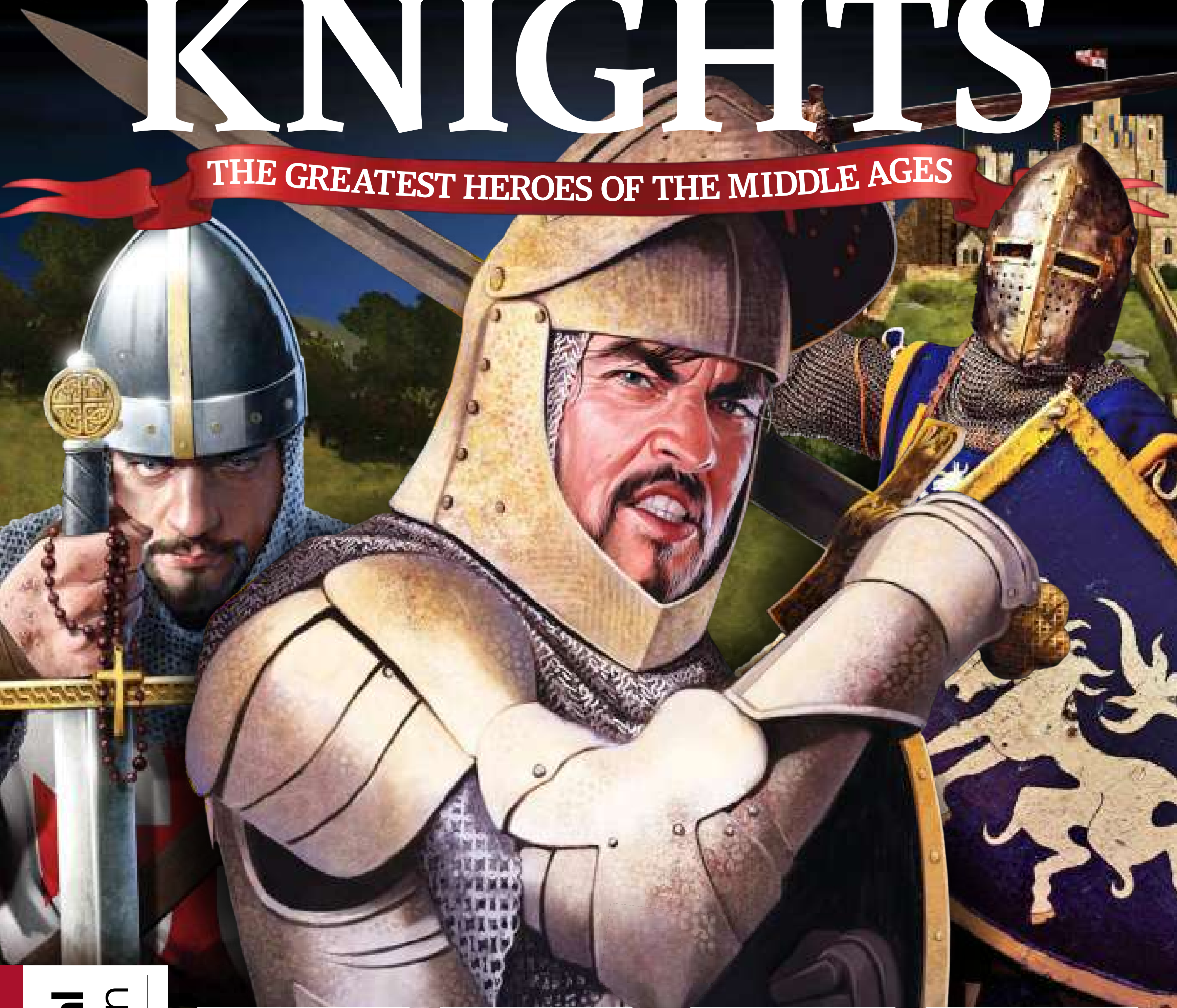
ALL ABOUT HISTORY

MEDIEVAL KNIGHTS

THE GREATEST HEROES OF THE MIDDLE AGES



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Arms and armour ✦ The Code of Chivalry ✦ The Knights Templar

Welcome to

ALL ABOUT HISTORY Book of

MEDIEVAL KNIGHTS

In both history and fairytale, the knight has represented strength, chivalry and honour. Whether defeating great foes at battle on horseback, or rescuing damsels from towering steeples, the legend of the knight is respected and admired. In All About History Book of Medieval Knights, you'll find out about the Hundred Years' War, the Wars of the Roses and the infamous battlefields of medieval Europe through the eyes of iconic figures such as El Cid, Richard the Lionheart and Edward the Black Prince. Explore the arms and armour they used and wore, the combat skills they had to master and the honour that it was their duty to uphold. Packed with incredible illustrations and insights into the period, this is the perfect guide for anyone who wants to learn about the Medieval knight.

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ALL ABOUT HISTORY Book of

MEDIEVAL KNIGHTS

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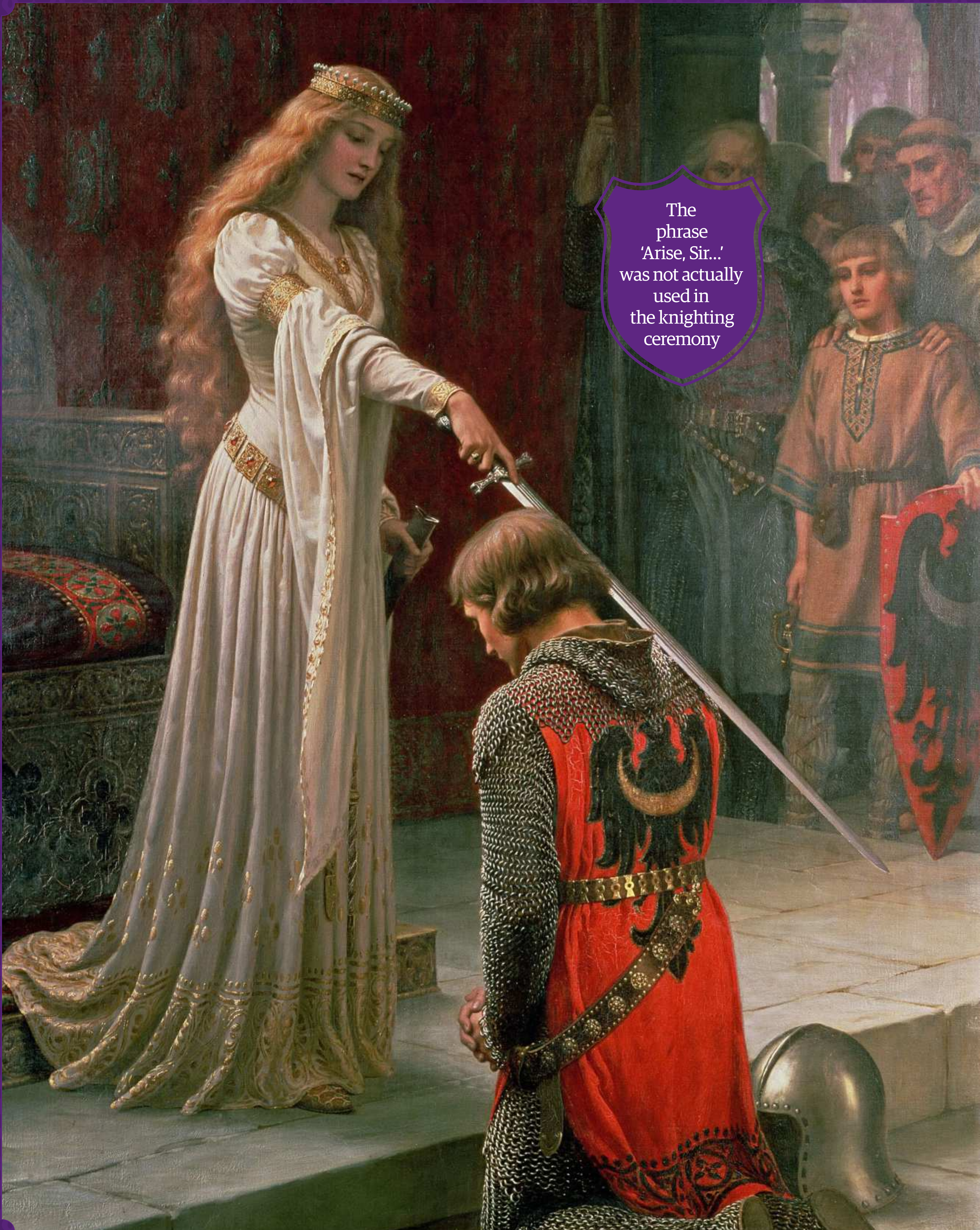


The phrase 'Arise, Sir…' was not actually used in the knighting ceremony

Evolution of the knight

A knight was the ultimate Medieval warrior, the sharpest weapon a lord could thrust at his foes, and one of the most highly distinguished men in the king's court

The notion of a knight immediately conjures up strong images – King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, a chivalrous English gentleman who fights for honour, ladies swooning, and valiant one-on-one battles. However, this common image of the Medieval knight did not just spring up from nowhere; in actuality, the concept of knighthood existed way before Medieval Europe. It had been developing, growing and evolving since ancient times.

To truly see the origins of the knight we have to cast our gazes back to ancient Rome, and a class of people known as the equites. The equites were the second property-based class in ancient Rome, ranked just below the senatorial class, and named from the Latin for horse – *equus*. In Roman tradition, the three tribes of Rome each had 100 equites, and these mounted soldiers developed as an important part of the Roman army, being paid three times more than ordinary troops. They came to hold immense power as members of the voting assembly, and eventually did less fighting and were known for being powerful businessmen and landowners. Emperor Augustus removed the equestrian order away from the political world and back into the military. In order to join, men had to be free of birth, be in good health and character, and possess sufficient wealth. They also had to serve in subordinate military posts for a time. Being an eques was a desirable position, and there was a long waiting list of people eager to replace any dismissed equites. By the 1st century CE, equites began to act more like modern civil servants, and they were employed as imperial agents in the provinces, and even had military authority in Egypt.

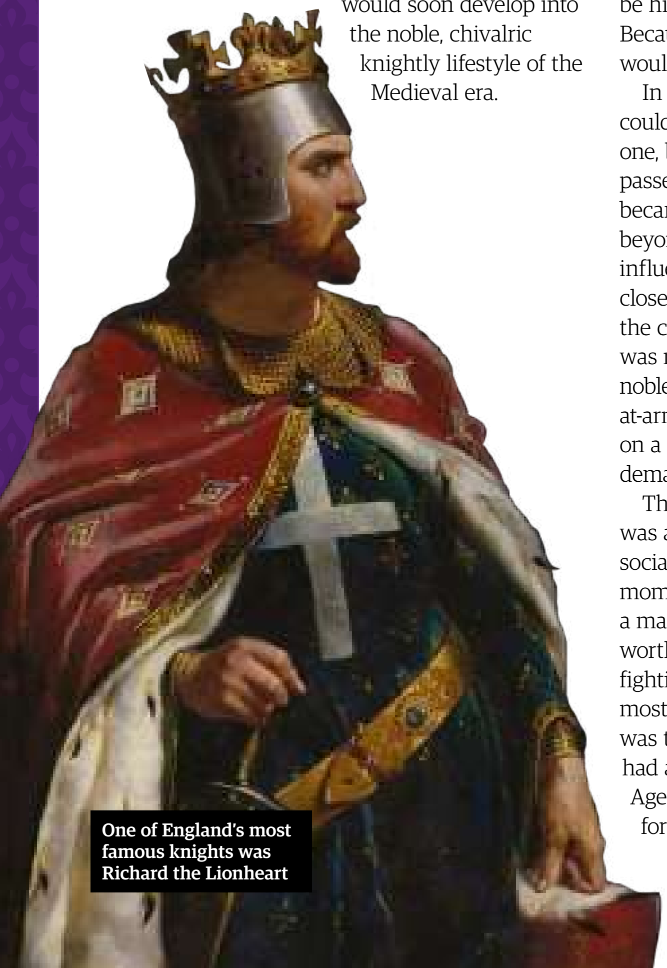
There have been many other soldiers throughout history who were mounted upon horses before the Middle Ages. The Ostrogoths, for instance, had a heavy reliance of cavalry, and those who could afford war horses in ancient Greece created cavalry units of their own. The late Roman and Byzantine Empire also had the bucellarii; these were not necessarily cavalry troops but, like Medieval knights, they were armies equipped and paid for by wealthy people. These elite fighters were better trained and equipped than regular soldiers, and became known as the military elite.

The Franks had the comitatus, who swore an oath of fealty to their leader. Unlike the rest of the troops, they would ride to battle on their horses, but usually dismounted to fight. However, by the Early Medieval Period, and the reign of Charlemagne, it became more and more common for these Frankish soldiers to remain on horseback to fight. This was aided and progressed with the development of the stirrup. Many traditions of Medieval knights can be traced back to Charlemagne, such as the ancient ceremony where a young man would be presented with weapons, not dissimilar to the later knighthood ceremony where young noblemen would also be gifted with weapons upon being promoted to a knight.

Charlemagne's mounted warriors were very successful, helping him to win conquest after conquest. He knew how important his elite troops were, so he gave them grants of land known as benefices to keep them sweet. This had the effect of making this warrior class grow stronger and more powerful, even after his death, and fiefs were passed down from father to son.

This warrior class became very important after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. The central governments in Europe were weak, and the people were terrorised by not only local bandits, but also Viking sea-raiders and greedy, ambitious neighbours. If a village or city wanted to prevent itself being plundered and burned to the ground it needed protection that the government was not going to provide. Knowing full well the superiority of mounted-armoured warriors, young, able-bodied men were gathered to fend off the threats to the cities. For their services, these men were rewarded with war booty, but this developed into grants of lands so the men could make an income to support their expensive equipment, including horses, armour and weapons.

For England it was the invasion of William the Conqueror that brought these ideas to the country. Anglo-Saxons mainly fought on foot, with a few exceptions, so when the Normans invaded, they brought with them not only a new king, but a lot of the social, cultural and political practices that would soon develop into the noble, chivalric knightly lifestyle of the Medieval era.



One of England's most famous knights was Richard the Lionheart

The Medieval knight

Although there are some exceptions, in almost all instances knights were strongly associated with horses. The reasons knights were able to rise in prominence was because of how devastating a man on a horse would be. Some Medieval societies hadn't even seen horses before, so the spectre of a man riding these beasts was utterly terrifying. This is where many nations got their names for their knights from – French knights were chevaliers, Spanish knights were caballeros, Italian knights were cavalier, and Germans called their knights ritter. All these names come from the word for horse or ride. England, however, broke this rule. 'Knight' came from the Anglo-Saxon word 'cniht', which meant retainer or household servant. Though as the role of knights grew over the Middle Ages, English knights became far more than servants.

The position of knight was highly desirable – it was a chance for lower-ranking nobles to climb the social ladder

The typical English knight of the Middle Ages would pledge service, loyalty and protection to higher nobles or lieges in return for land and even food, lodging, armour, weapons, horses and, of course, money. The knight would generally hold their lands through their military duty, which usually lasted 40 days each year. Knights who had proved themselves capable in combat would be highly sought after and earn a higher price. Because of the prestige surrounding knights, they would also receive a position at the king's court.

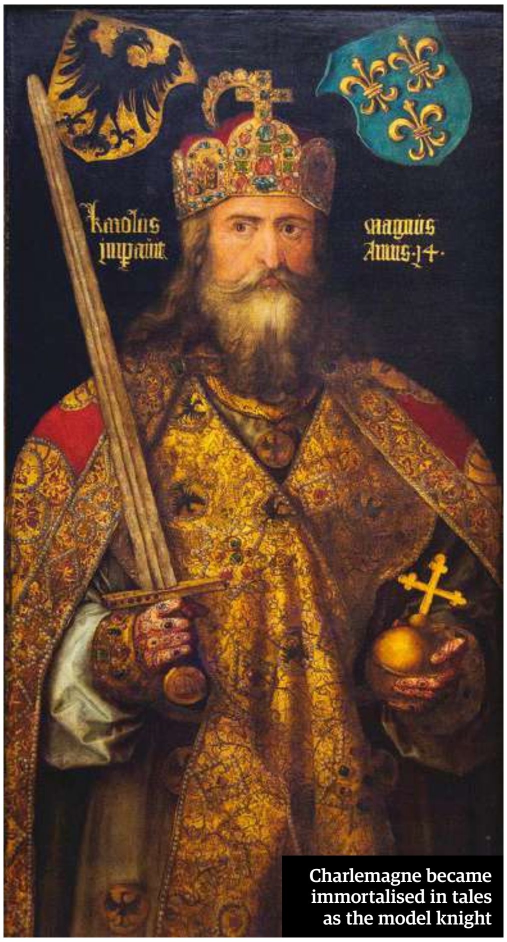
In the earliest days of the knights, any man who could prove his proficiency in battle could become one, but this quickly changed. The land grants were passed from father to eldest son, and the knights became known as a landed class, with power far beyond being a sword for hire. Knights became influential figures, involved in social politics and closely connected to the most powerful people in the country. Into the 12th century, a distinction was made between these 'true knights' and non-noble cavalrymen who were known only as 'men-at-arms'. To be a knight didn't just mean fighting on a horse in a battle – it was a social rank that demanded power and respect.

The position of knight was highly desirable. It was a chance for lower-ranking nobles to climb the social ladder in a society with almost no upward momentum. It was rare, and very hard going, but if a man worked hard enough, he could prove himself worthy to become a knight by his bravery and fighting prowess on the battlefield. However, the most common way for a boy to become a knight was to be born into it. A son of a knight or royalty had an established path set out to become a knight. Aged eight, he was sent off to work as a page for the local lords. In this role he would learn the ways of the court, writing, music and weapons. Then, aged 13, he would become a squire, where he would train with weapons, horse riding and combat skills. Once his training was complete, a squire would become a knight through a ceremony known as the accolade. Usually held during a big holiday, this knighting ceremony would include a ritual bath and prayer vigil, and would accumulate in the new knight swearing an oath. The knight would then be knighted with a tap of a sword on his shoulder.

The prestige of a knight

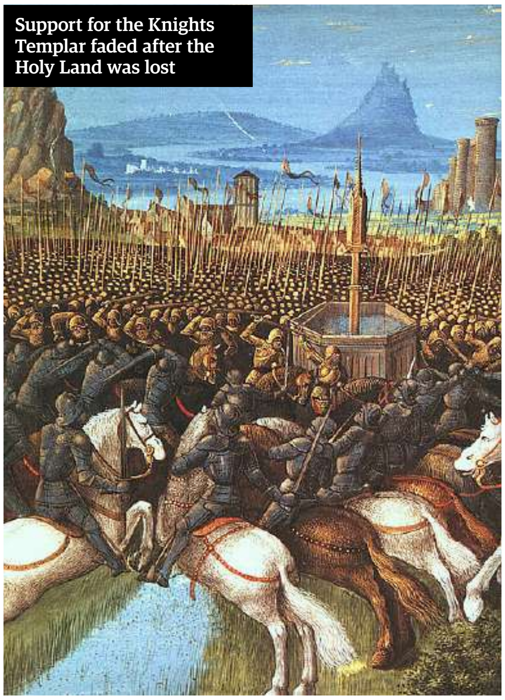
There was a very good reason nobles were scrambling over each other to become knights. They were the most feared and respected foe on the Medieval field. Mounted soldiers were the elite of the era due to their immense advantages in battle, and the ability to fight on horseback wasn't something just anyone could do. It took years of training to master, and an esteemed, fearful and respected reputation grew around these elite warriors. A line of mounted knights thrusting with polearms could easily smash through the defensive lines of any normal foot soldier.

Although knights were highly esteemed, several innovations in weaponry threatened their



Charlemagne became immortalised in tales as the model knight

> "His tremendous victory at Verneuil was soon dubbed by contemporaries as the second Agincourt"


Support for the Knights Templar faded after the Holy Land was lost

supremacy. However, it was the ability of these knights to overcome these challenges that created such an invincible aura around them. When the longbow and crossbow were introduced in the 12th century, the shots could easily piece the chainmail worn by knights, but by the 13th century, knights had adopted plate armour, which protected them from these arrows. As the weapons improved, so did the armour, and as the Iron Age developed, weapons became more readily available, making the role of knights even more important in defense of their lords. By the 15th century, a knight in the field was completely encased in armour, making them almost helpless on foot, but a terrifying unstoppable machine when mounted.

With the knight unrivalled on the field, and a highly sought-after and respected social position, from the 15th to 17th century the idea of knighthood developed from the art of fighting to a code of conduct to be followed. It is this knights' code that is often romanticised in tales such as King Arthur and, for many, became far more appealing and important than their proficiency on the battlefield.

The chivalrous knight

It was the tales of European legends that first brought the idea of chivalry to the forefront of knighthood. Charlemagne's paladins were immortalised in songs of heroic exploits. Tales of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table were told over and over again through Medieval literature, and popularised the idea of the brave, chivalrous and noble knight. Another root cause of chivalry was the strong link that formed between Christianity and knighthood. This Christian warrior was emphasised in the Crusades, and the idea of knights being soldiers of Christ steadily grew.

This concept of a soldier of Christ was not a new invention of the Crusades, and actually had been brewing and developing for hundreds of years, starting in the 10th century in France. The Frankish society at the time was known for being brutal and violent, and when it collided with the Christian Church, this violence began to be regulated. Violence and fighting was seen as a profession, one that was passed down through generations. As the Christian church regulated this violence, a code was created for these horse-bound warriors, highly influencing the later code of conduct known as chivalry.

The actual code varied over time, but the main focus of the chivalrous knight was to dutifully serve his lord, and to protect his lands and his people. A knight was charged with looking after those who were weaker, and especially those of lesser rank, such as the poor and women. On the field, knights were expected to fight bravely and with military professionalism. This created an aura of respect around knights, and when they were taken as prisoners in battle, they were given comfortable lodgings and were well looked after when compared with common soldiers, who more often than not were killed. It is ironic that the knights' code of conduct did not extend to these archers and foot soldiers, as often they were seen as hindrances to knights being able to face other knights in combat, and treated as such.

Over time, this code of conduct in battle extended to the social realm. Knights were expected to be utterly respectable gentlemen in the courtly sphere too, with excellent knowledge of religion, writing, music and even law. This chivalrous code developed into other specific duties, which knights would engage in to demonstrate their abilities, such as attending

The evolution of armour

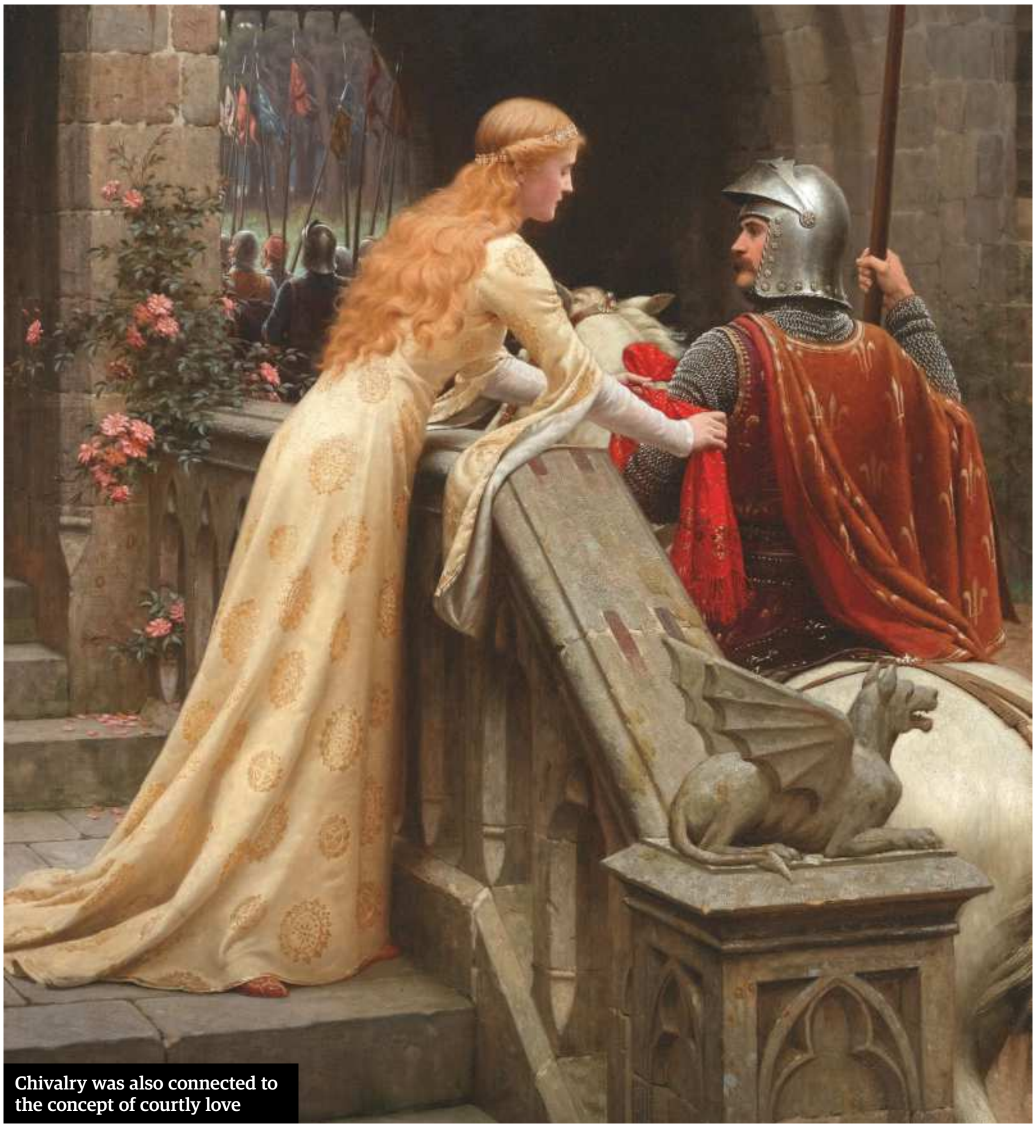
What exactly makes the infamous armour that has been attributed to the knight throughout history

Although the most common image of a knight is a man clothed in full plate mail, this imposing figure was actually the accumulation of years of development of metalworking and blacksmithing.

As more efficient weapons were created to wound through a knight's armour, armour was built to withstand it. Chainmail was a knight's staple, but as crossbows were developed, smiths added pieces of plate in order to halt these arrows either on top of or beneath the chainmail suits. These were not full suits of armour, but just specific parts of the body were protected – such as elbow guards and chest plates. Over time, more plate armour was developed, such as vambraces for the arms and grieves for the legs. By the 15th century, Medieval armour had developed into a full plate suit. Two schools of armour-making, the German and Italian, merged into the ultimate defensive suit – the Maximilian.

As the role of the knight himself expanded, so did his selection of armour. There was specific armour created for all of the knight's duties – field armour for battle; ceremonial armour, which focused on stunning elaborate details; and jousting armour designed specifically to help the knight excel in tournaments.

Armour would often replicate the fashion of the era, for example the pleated clothing of 16th-century Europe



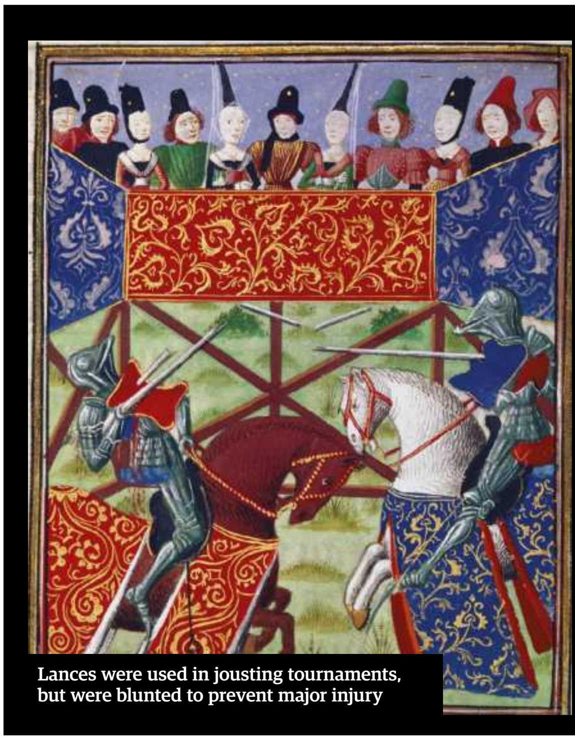
Chivalry was also connected to the concept of courtly love

tournaments, hunting parties and jousting. Religion also continued to play a major part in the role of the knight, and over time the men were required to vow to use their weapons to protect the weak and defenseless, as well as strictly following the commands of the church. These Christian armies of knights would regard going off on a crusade as a religious duty, and back home they were expected to show religious values. This included not only their conduct on the battlefield, but also their conduct at court and in public functions.

Although these were the ideals of Medieval knights, the code of chivalry, like much of history, has been romanticised over the centuries through stories that twisted the truth. It wasn't until the later part of the Middle Ages that chivalry fully embedded itself in knightly culture. Throughout history there were many knights who were no more than bloodthirsty warriors, cruel, ruthless and out only for their own gain.

Knightly orders

As the prestige of knights grew, they began to form alliances outside of the normal knight/lord relationship. Usually taking on a religious and military nature, some of these organisations continue to intrigue people today. The first military order of knighthood was the Knights Hospitallers and the Holy Sepulchre, Catholic military orders formed during the First Crusade in 1099. Other similar groups sprang up over time, including the Teutonic Knights and the Knights Templars. The focus of these groups was to simply protect pilgrims journeying to the holy land, however, after successful Christian conquests these orders of knights became more important and powerful in the crusader states.



Lances were used in jousting tournaments, but were blunted to prevent major injury

More than a sword

Did the knight's weapon of choice make them what they were, or was the sword just an accessory?

In both myth and history, the knight has always been strongly associated with the sword. It's what they were knighted with on their shoulder, and in myth many knights' swords, such as a mystical Excalibur, were given their own names and special powers. Traditionally, the sword was regarded with honour, and mastering the use of it was considered to be the epitome of a knight's power. With the Iron Age, swords became longer, stronger and even more deadly. The handles of swords also grew longer, allowing for the knights to wield powerful two-handed weapons. There were even swords that were developed specifically to cut and thrust through armour.

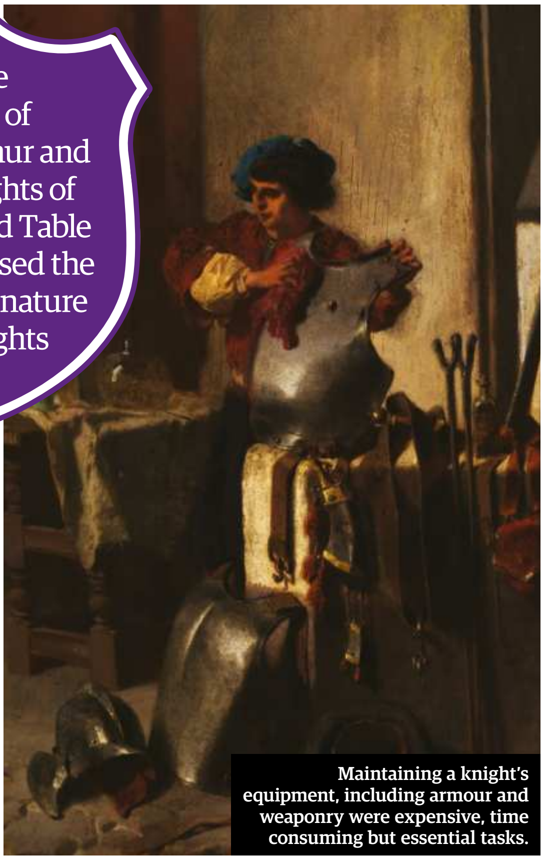
However, the sword was not the only weapon at a knight's disposal. The use of maces in battle was popular in the Early Middle Ages, as not only were they easy to create, but they could be used to great devastation. Warhammers were also used to great effect, with the hammer end inflicting tremendous blows, and the pick penetrating a foe's armour. As blacksmithing developed, the use of polearm weapons in battle became very popular, such as the lance, spear and halberd. With far longer reach than swords, at anywhere from six to 12 feet in length, a polearm weapon could be used to dismount knights from their steeds, leaving them vulnerable in the field of battle.

The Knights Templar are by far the most famous organisation of knights in history, mainly due to the intrigue surrounding them. This is largely due to their progressive leaps forward in banking, which allowed them to become one of the wealthiest and most powerful organisations in the Medieval world. Stories around their rumoured treasures, fed by this mysterious and wealthy history, still persist today.

There were a host of other knightly organisations, and many of these did not emerge until the Late Middle Ages, for example the Knights of the Annunciation, a religious order of chivalry created in Italy. The Order of the Knights of the Holy Spirit, a French organisation that included the king ruling as grandmaster, and 100 knights serving beneath him. The Order of the Dragon, founded by members known as Draconists, rumoured to provide the inspiration for Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. A few other organisations claiming to be knightly still exist today, but of course these incorporate the more religious, chivalric values, and are not the military orders of the past. For example, the Knights of Columbus is a Catholic organisation that strives to upkeep knightly values, such as charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism. The British Order of the Garter was formed in the mid-14th century and still exists today. Although membership is limited to the sovereign, prince of Wales and 24 select numbers. The order also includes a number of knights and ladies. Today it stands as the oldest order of knighthood in existence and one of the highest honours of the British honours system.

Ultimately, although the days of knights riding, fully plated, on a horse are certainly over, for many the concept of chivalry, and the prestige of holding the title of knighthood, still survives strong today.

The tales of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table romanticised the chivalric nature of knights



Maintaining a knight's equipment, including armour and weaponry were expensive, time consuming but essential tasks.

The use of knights decreased as countries found it cheaper to maintain professional armies, or use mercenaries as and when conflicts arose

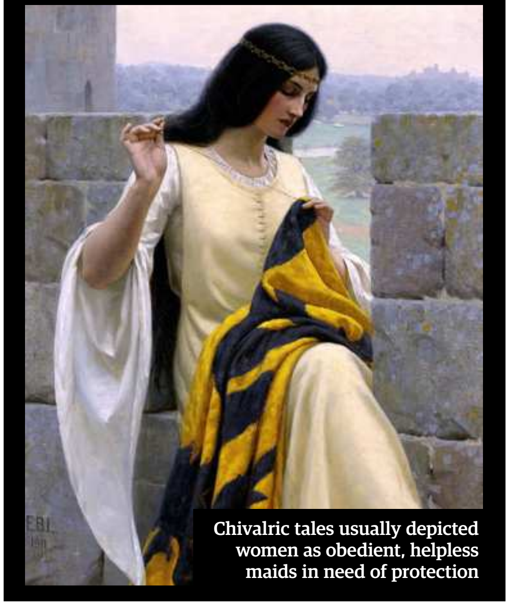
The code of chivalry

What rules were the knights sworn to live by?

When speaking about knightly chivalry, the 'chivalric code' is often referenced. This was not an actual document with set rules for knights to follow, but rather a social code that knights were expected to uphold. However, a code of chivalry was documented in epic poem *The Song of Roland*, written between 1089 and 1100, and gives a good basis for how a chivalrous knight was expected to behave. For example, the poem says that a knight was expected to:

- **Uphold the church**
- **Protect the weak, especially widows and orphans**
- **Live with honour and glory**
- **Obey authority**
- **Protect the honour of fellow knights**
- **Refrain from deceit, unfairness and meanness**
- **Always speak the truth**
- **Never give up**
- **Respect the honour of women**
- **Never back down from a challenge from an equal**
- **Never turn his back upon a foe**

It is interesting to note that the majority of the entries relate to moral chivalrous acts, rather than acts of combat, indicating that it was even more important to be chivalrous beyond the battlefield than on it.



Chivalric tales usually depicted women as obedient, helpless maids in need of protection

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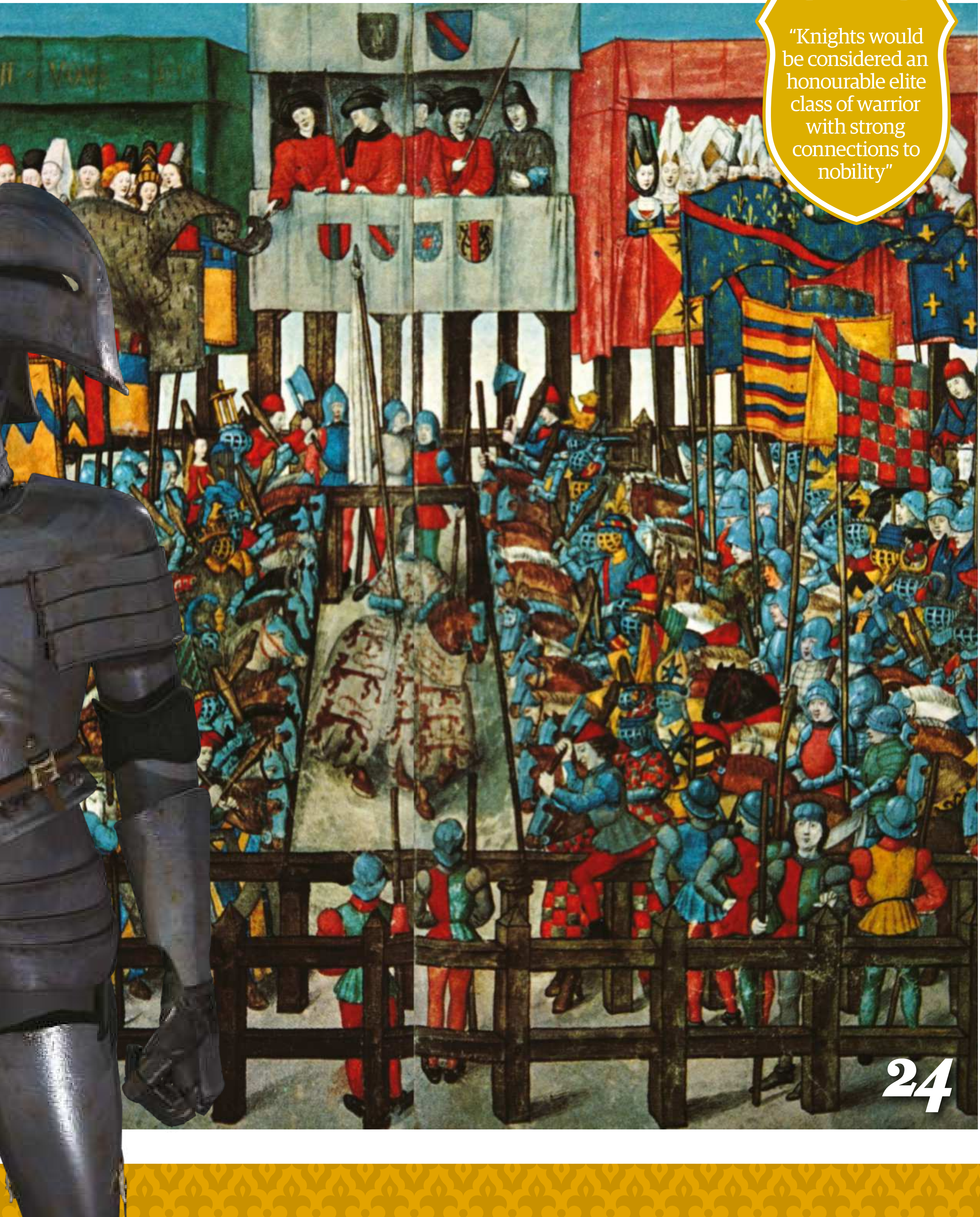


> "Knights would be considered an honourable elite class of warrior with strong connections to nobility"

24

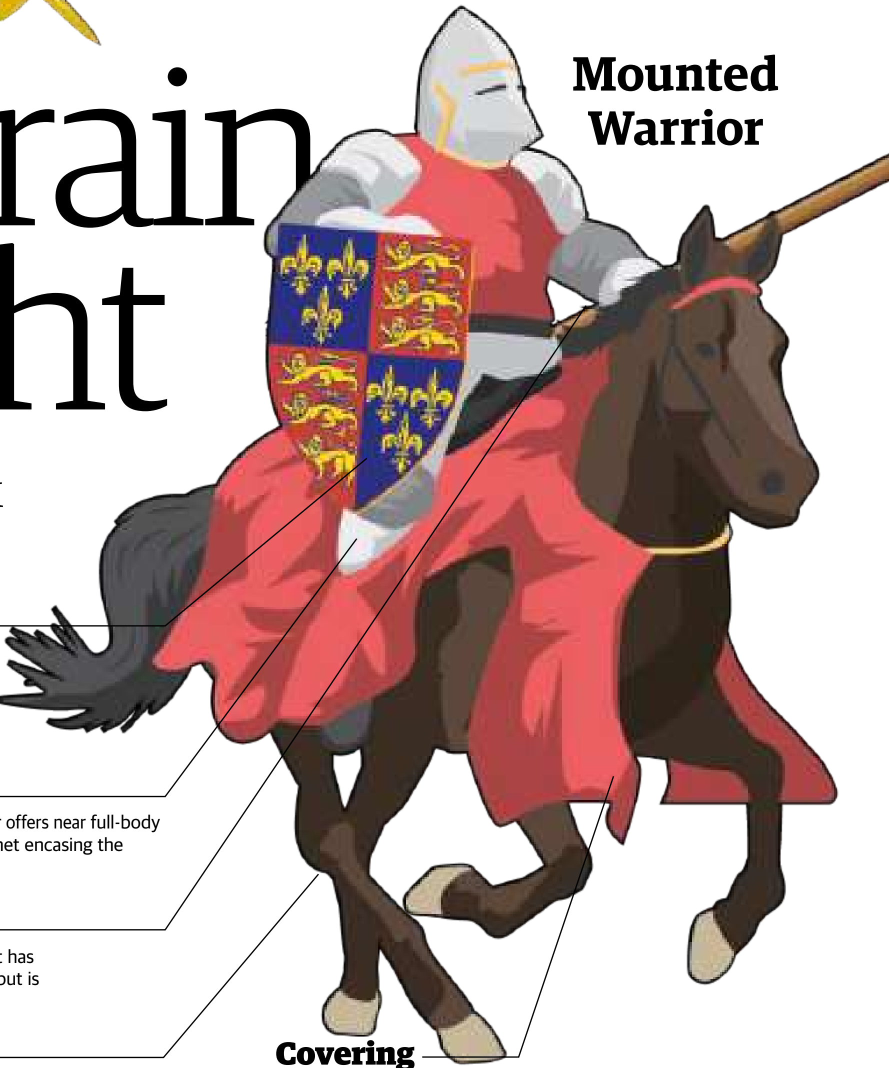
How to train as a knight

Becoming an elite cavalry warrior took more than a decade of training

Across much of Medieval Europe, the feudal system of grants of land made in return for service held sway. Kings gave vast areas to their wealthiest nobles in return for military support.

Similarly, those nobles gave smaller plots to lower lords, who rented it to peasants to farm. Yet while kings and higher nobles weren't strangers to battle, it was those lower lords, or knights, who were the true warrior class. Their fighting skills were so valued that they were often ransomed if captured in combat. Small wonder, then, that acquiring those skills took years of determination and dedication.

Mounted Warrior



Shield
For defence, but also for identification in the heat of confused battle, via the knight's decorative coat of arms.

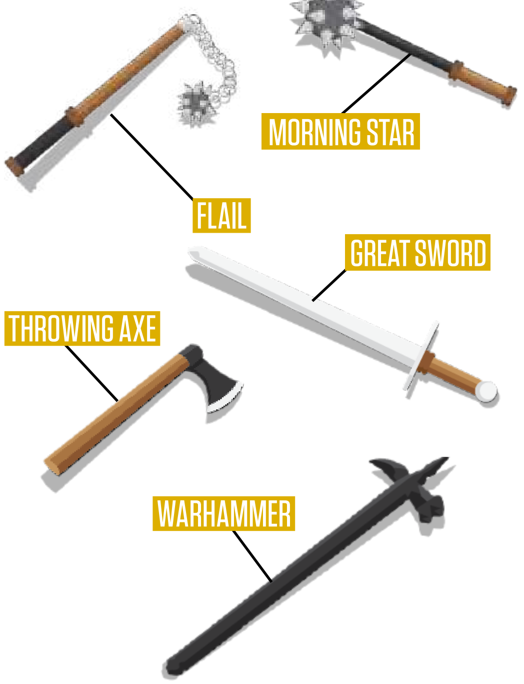
Armour
By 1400, full plate steel armour offers near full-body protection. The bascinet helmet encasing the head gives a menacing look.

Lance
Some four metres in length, it has a blunt, flat end for jousting, but is sharpened for combat.

Horse
The destrier breed is favoured, being strong, quick and agile, though others such as coursers or rounceys are widely used.

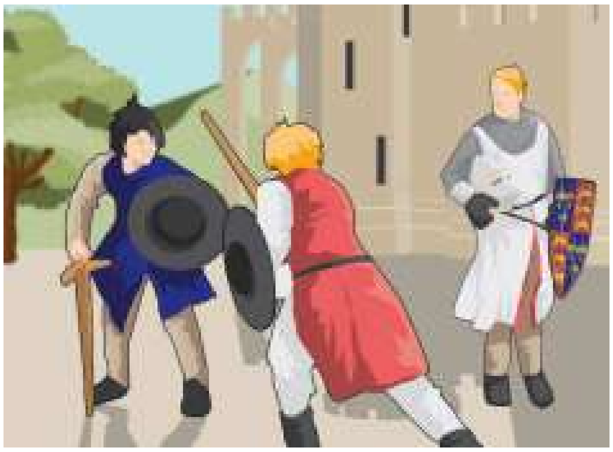
Covering
A caparison reflecting the knight's coat of arms adorns his charger for jousts. For warfare, horse armour called barding may be worn.

What you'll need



1 Be lucky at birth

While it is not unheard of for sons of lowly peasants to rise to knighthood, it helps greatly to be born of noble, wealthy stock. Offspring of lordly knights with access to expensive horses and equipment have all the advantages, yet you will still have to prove yourself worthy of honour in the daunting years ahead.

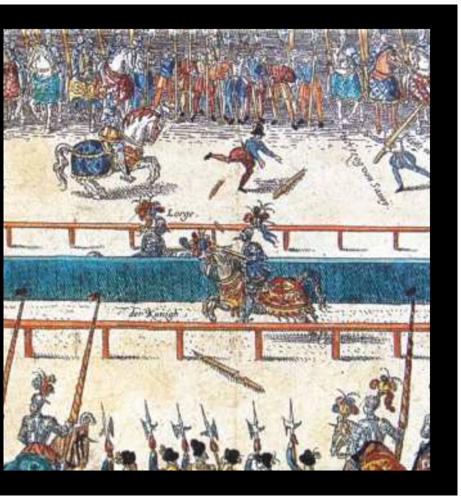


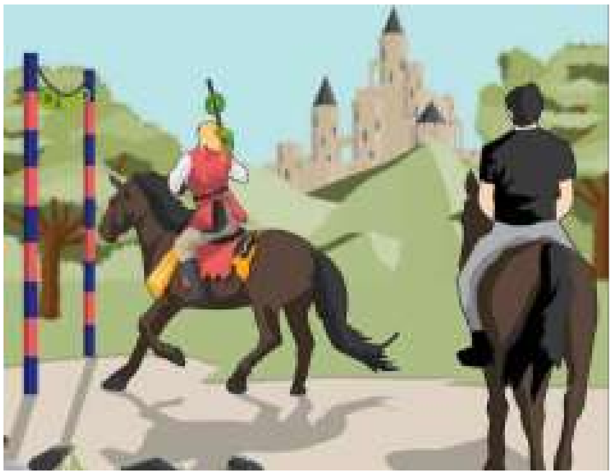
2 Play gets serious

Around the age of seven, young boys take on the role of page to a lord. As one, you'll begin to learn skills like archery, falconry and of course horsemanship, as well being taught chivalry – the codes by which a knight should live. Importantly, play with wooden swords subtly teaches you the vital craft of swordsmanship.

How not to enjoy the benefits of knighthood

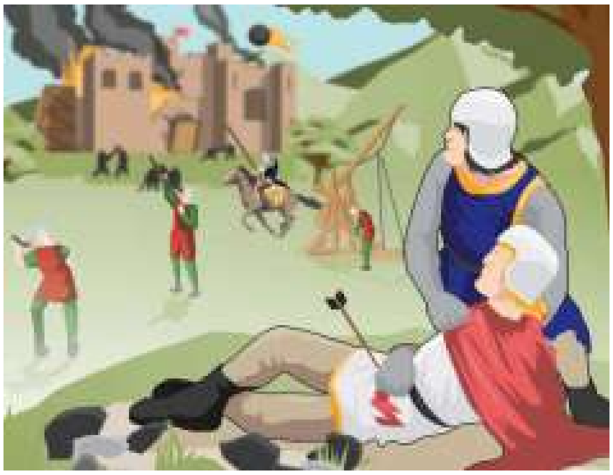
King Henry II of France had put himself in a strong position. The peace treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis had been concluded, ending 60 years of conflict with Spain over disputed neighbouring territories. His daughter Elisabeth had wed King Phillip II of Spain, cementing relations between the two countries. England, also signatories of the treaty, had given Calais back to France, and even Henry's sickly son Francis had been married off to Mary, Queen of Scots, confirming another alliance. The prospects for France and its 40-year-old king looked healthy. In celebration, Henry, a fervent huntsman and joust competitor, hosted a tournament. He challenged Gabriel Montgomery, Lord of Lorge and captain of the Scottish Guard, at the French court. When they clashed, Montgomery's lance shattered. Splinters flew everywhere, including through Henry's eye and into his brain. He swiftly absolved Montgomery of any blame, but soon deteriorated, dying ten days later.





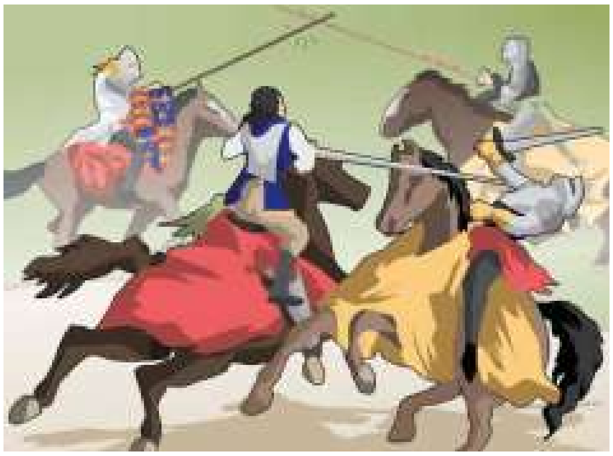
3 Service for knowledge

Pages become squires at about 14. You'll have learned to handle a lance on wooden horses, but now you're developing those skills on live ones. Those horses need tending, though, and that's one of your tasks, along with cleaning armour and weapons. Smart squires learn plenty watching the knight they serve in tournament jousts – yet he'll have obligations too…



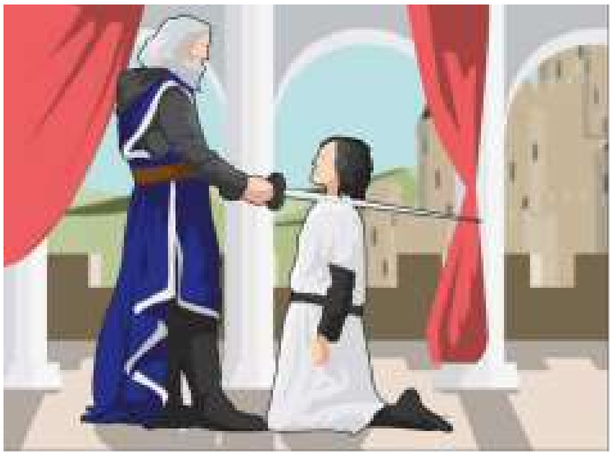
4 The apprenticeship gets real

If the king summons your knight to battle, he will take his squires with him. Before, he'll likely have been educating you about castle defence and siege warfare – now you're finding out firsthand. One of the harshest lessons of all, of life and death, cannot be escaped. Whether vaunted kings or fledgling squires, people die on battlefields.



5 Forged in battle

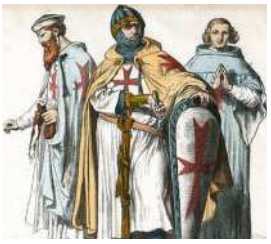
You live to tell the tale, and to fight another day. You honour your friend's memory by striving to be as good a warrior as him. In further campaigns, you don't hesitate to join dismounted knights as they fight hand-to-hand in brutal, bloody melees. Courage and bravery combined with your diligently acquired skills mark you out as special.



6 A tap on the shoulder

The usual age at which a squire can be dubbed a knight is 21. Your exceptional battlefield valour, however, may mean you receive the honour early. After a night of solitary prayer, you swear oaths to protect the king and to act chivalrously. As you kneel in front of the monarch, a sword is placed on your shoulder and you rise as a knight of the realm.

Famous… ORDERS OF KNIGHTHOOD



KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

C. 1118-1312, MIDDLE EAST

This military religious order protected pilgrims journeying to the Holy Land, but was disbanded by Pope Clement V due to pressure from Phillip IV of France.

TEUTONIC KNIGHTS

C. 1190-PRESENT, GERMANY

Founded during the Crusades as a nursing, then military, unit, it later relocated to subdue the pagan Baltic region. It is a religious charitable organisation today.

THE ORDER OF THE GARTER

1348-PRESENT, ENGLAND

Set up by Edward III, it consists of the sovereign, the Prince of Wales and no more than 24 members.

THE ORDER OF THE GOLDEN FLEECE

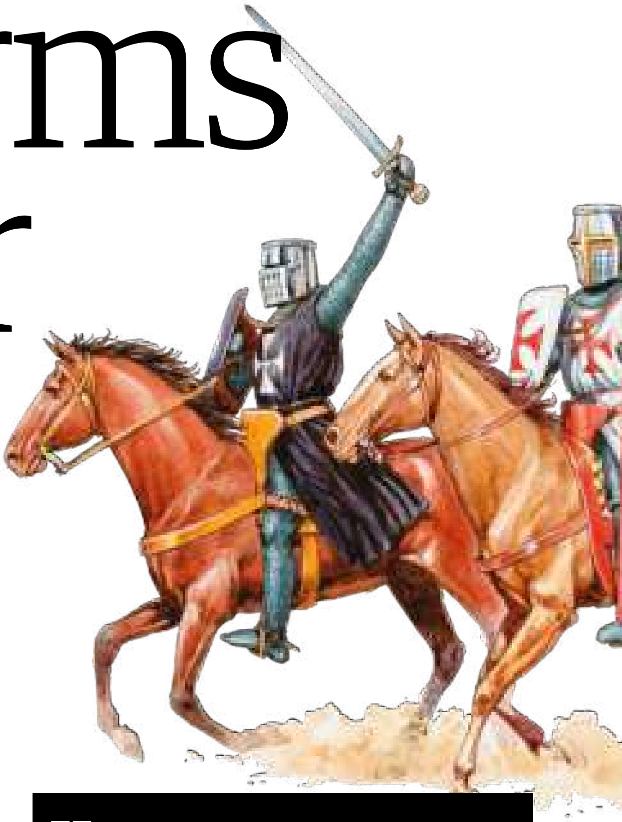
1430-PRESENT, FRANCE

Founded in Burgundy by Phillip III, it later became associated with Austria and Spain.

© Illustrations: Ed Crooks, Getty Images

Medieval arms and armour

Knights were respected and capable of delivering death with an array of devastating weapons



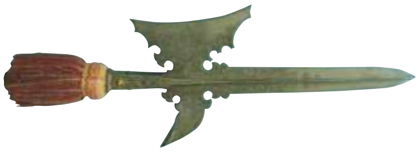
Life in Medieval times was rarely peaceful, and with wars raging throughout the period, it was necessary to have a large group of fighters who could defend property, or their lords, when necessary.

At the top end of the scale were knights, who were employed at great expense by the noble classes. They fought terrifying battles on horseback in return for pieces of land - or a fief - from the rulers or lords employing their services in a model of government known as feudalism.

It ensured knights would be considered an honourable elite class of warrior with strong connections to nobility. But they were expected to subscribe to the code of chivalry, which sloughed off some of their rough edges.

Over time, the expense of the knights saw relatively untrained infantrymen recruited from the peasant classes, and eventually more skilled middle-class freemen also took up the fight. But it is the knights who tend to hallmark the Medieval period, with their weapons and armour becoming iconic as the centuries have passed.

Four fearsome weapons

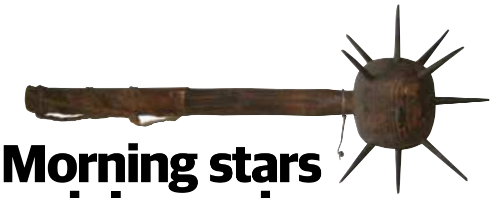


Halberds offered thrusting power

As the Swiss army knife of its time (and indeed it was popular with 14th and 15th-century Swiss armies), the halberd comprised a long, sharp wooden pike together with an axe blade and a hook used to prise riders from their horses. The shaft could be reinforced with metal.

Longbows provided rapid ranged attack

Favoured for their long-range ability, longbows were more than 1.8 metres in length and they were typically made from yew wood and a glue-soaked string of hemp. Archers could release up to a dozen arrows per minute, devastating the enemy, particularly in the Hundred Years' War.



Morning stars rudely awoke

Morning stars were fearsome weapons which bore similarities to the mace, only with the small knobs replaced by spikes or blades. Used by both the infantry and cavalry, they would be grasped by their wooden shaft and swung into the face or legs of the enemy.

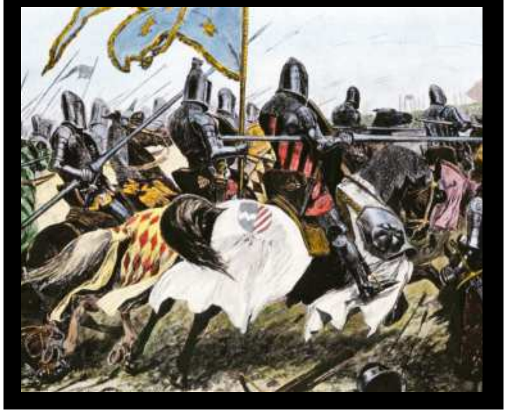
The arming sword was essential

Knights would rarely travel without their swords, making them among the most common Medieval weapons. Hugely symbolic and used in cut-and-thrust defence combat, they were straight, double-edged weapons with a blade of around 80 centimetres, typically used with a shield.

Here comes the cavalry

Medieval horsemen were well-trained, disciplined and professional soldiers whose expertise was important, especially in mounting a tightly formed shock charge. There were two main types of cavalry - light and heavy - with those that belonged to the former being lightly armed and expected to carry out lower-threat duties such as reconnaissance and skirmishing.

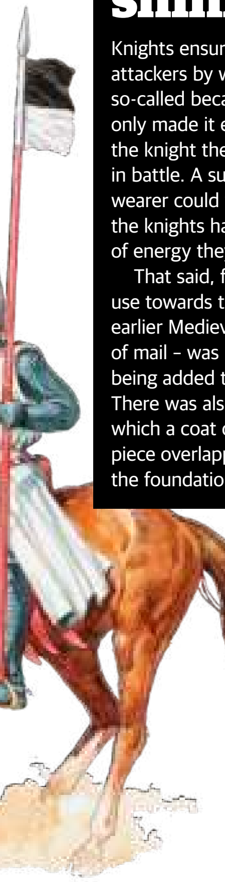
The heavy cavalry would consist of knights and would be well-armoured and carry the most dangerous of weapons. Their on-high position and mobile nature would allow them to inflict great damage on the enemy and they fought alongside the unmounted rank and file. As well as playing a decisive role and guarding castles, knights were also respected and they could be granted a portion of land as a reward.

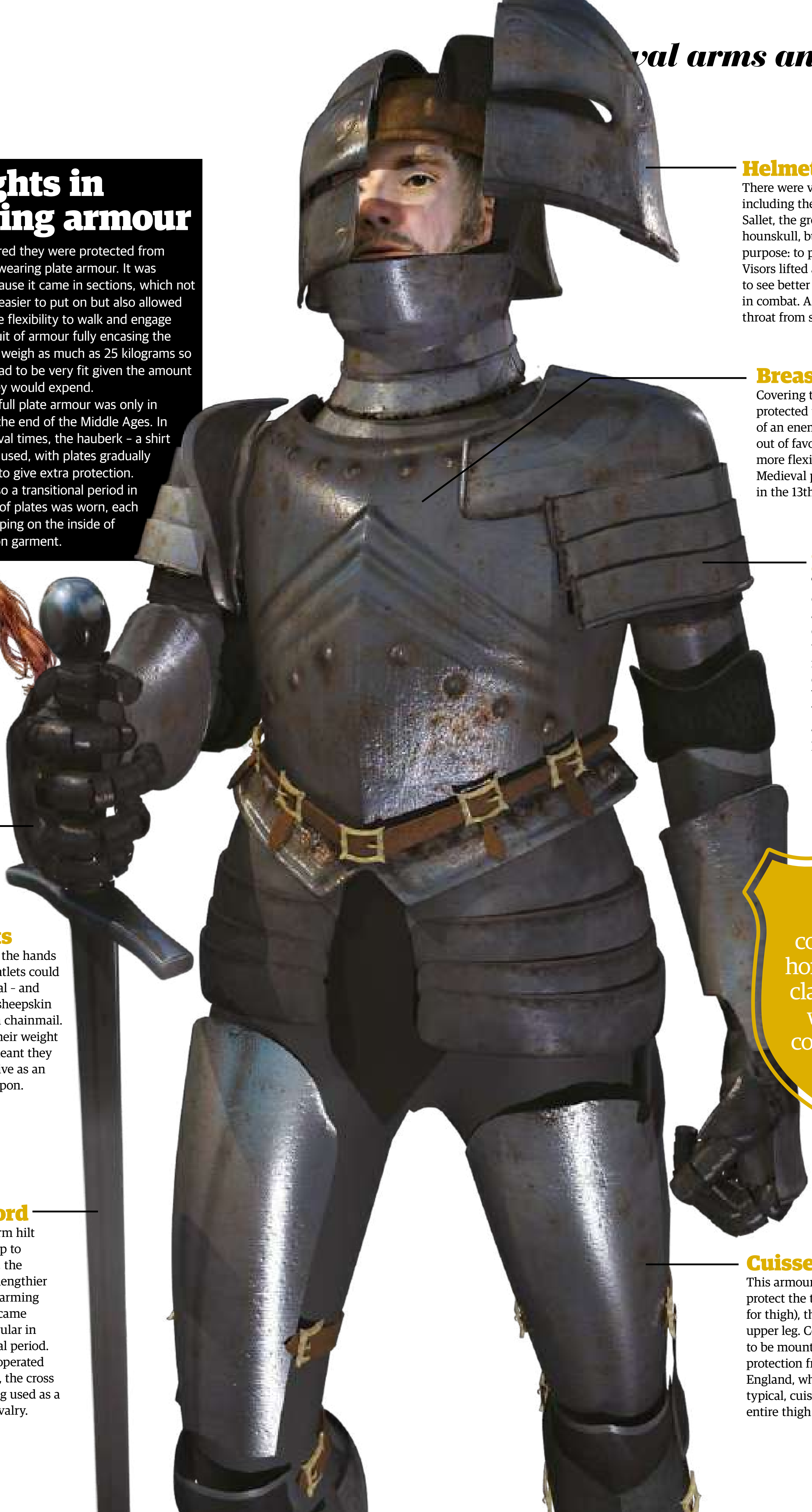


Knights in shining armour

Knights ensured they were protected from attackers by wearing plate armour. It was so-called because it came in sections, which not only made it easier to put on but also allowed the knight the flexibility to walk and engage in battle. A suit of armour fully encasing the wearer could weigh as much as 25 kilograms so the knights had to be very fit given the amount of energy they would expend.

That said, full plate armour was only in use towards the end of the Middle Ages. In earlier Medieval times, the hauberk – a shirt of mail – was used, with plates gradually being added to give extra protection. There was also a transitional period in which a coat of plates was worn, each piece overlapping on the inside of the foundation garment.





Helmet

There were various types of helmet including the barbute, the Coventry Sallet, the great helm and the hounskull, but they all had a common purpose: to protect the head and face. Visors lifted away to allow the soldier to see better when he wasn't engaged in combat. A bevor would protect the throat from sword strikes.

Breastplate

Covering the torso, the breastplate protected the chest from the thrust of an enemy weapon and while it fell out of favour and was replaced by more flexible chainmail in the earlier Medieval period, it returned to use in the 13th century.

Rerebrace

The rerebrace would cover the upper arms and ensure good coverage above the elbow while allowing decent movement. The vambrace covered the lower arm and besagews would attach between the breastplate and the rerebrace to protect the armpit.

Gauntlets

Worn to protect the hands and wrists, gauntlets could be made of metal - and be worn over a sheepskin mitten - or from chainmail. In either case, their weight and structure meant they were also effective as an impromptu weapon.

> "Knights would be considered an honourable elite class of warrior with strong connections to nobility"

Longsword

With its cruciform hilt and a blade of up to 110 centimetres, the longsword was lengthier than the trusty arming sword and it became particularly popular in the late Medieval period. It tended to be operated with two hands, the cross sometimes being used as a hook against cavalry.

Cuisse

This armoured plate was worn to protect the thigh (cuisse being French for thigh), thereby protecting the upper leg. Continental soldiers tended to be mounted and only needed protection from the front whereas in England, where foot combat was also typical, cuisses tended to protect the entire thigh including the back.

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The weaponry revolution

Technology has always found advancement in the crucible of war, and the Hundred Years' War would see the birth of a revolution in early modern weaponry

When the Hundred Years' War began the armies that dominated on European battlefields were led by feudal warrior-aristocrats. These men and their followers usually made up the martial core of an army, which would take to the field in a time when heavily armoured cavalry charges could make or break a battle. However, this would soon change as the conflict saw advances in technology and weapons alongside new battlefield tactics that would be the beginning of a weaponry revolution that would come to shape Europe.

The English came to dominate the early engagements with the fearsome longbow, whose range and armour penetration were the bane of the French heavy cavalry. Infantry also began to be utilised by the English with weapons like the billhook, a staff weapon with both a broad cutting head and stabbing point used to negate the heavy French armour. Gunpowder also made its impact on the European map, with rudimentary cannons and handguns becoming more popular in the latter half of the conflict.

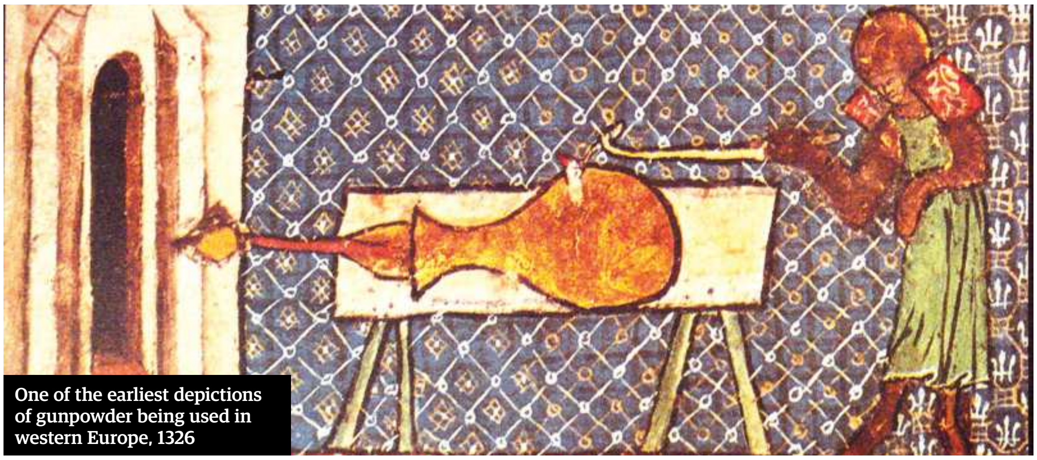
These new and fearsome weapons could only be withstood by the most heavily fortified castles and quickly redrew both the continent's map and the handbook of military engagement. The Medieval military world that had relied on brute strength and force of arms was now evolving.

Gunpowder 1267
England/France/Burgundy/Scotland

Gunpowder would be a substance that would come to dominate warfare around the globe. Arriving in Europe in 1267 with Roger Bacon's recipe, it would not come to be used in Western military engagements until the 1320s. Scottish chroniclers record the English using a weapon called a 'crakys of wer', a gunpowder weapon that let off a terrific sound, or 'crack'. Cannons soon became a staple of an army's artillery train alongside catapults and trebuchets.

At this time gunpowder artillery was not used to bombard and knock down walls but to fire over them in order to destroy buildings within the town or city. It was also used in conjunction with more established artillery pieces, but it doesn't seem to have had much of an impact on the length of a siege due to the lack of breaching power. These early cannons would have been small and inexpensive, costing around half as much as a ballista or catapult. Gunpowder had an advantage over conventional artillery in that the noise it created took a telling toll on enemy moral, especially those unused to seeing this terrifying new type of weapon.

By the 15th century technology was improving. In 1415 Henry V used 12 guns to devastate the buildings of Harfleur, forcing the garrison to seek surrender terms. It wasn't just the besiegers who would utilise gunpowder – artillery was just as effective. Henry V actually directed his artillery at Harfleur's walls not to demolish them but to knock out the answering fire from the French defenders.



One of the earliest depictions of gunpowder being used in western Europe, 1326

Just ten years later gunpowder technology had advanced enough to threaten a castle's walls, as the French discovered to their cost when lost the town of Saite-Suzanne in Mayenne. "The count of Salisbury had nine large bombards and many large cannon and fowlers [lighter cannon] sited and set up. These bombards and cannons, after eight or ten days, began to fire incessantly, day and night, so that they beat down the walls of the said town from more than a bow-shot away."

By the end of the 1440s, gunpowder artillery was in its element. At the beginning of the decade Harfleur had resisted a full three months of bombardment, but in 1449 it was brought back under French control within just 17 days. 1450 saw an unprecedented wave of the French reoccupying many towns and castles with the help of artillery. Around 100 – many that required lengthy sieges to capture in the first place – fell to the Franco-Burgundian forces. The centuries-old reliance on defensive fortifications was completely thrown into jeopardy. Earthworks and trenches were dug to protect the new, larger artillery pieces as gunpowder fast replaced conventional catapults and trebuchets.

Crossbow 6th century CE

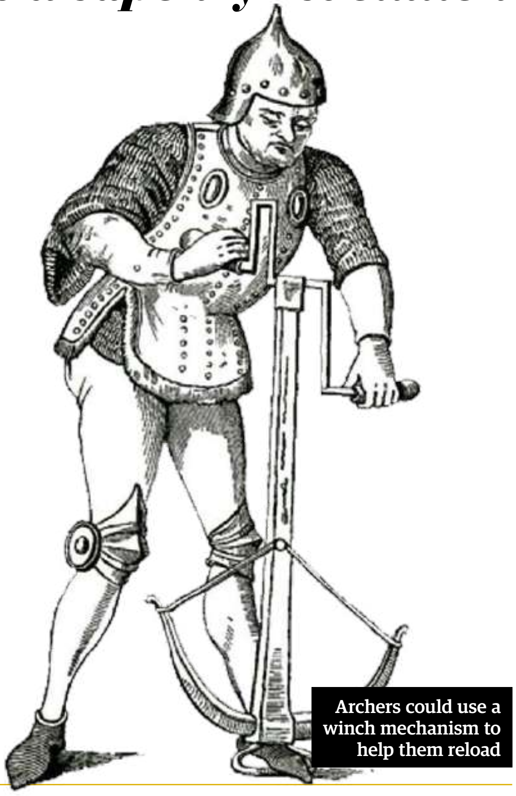
France

While the English made extensive use of the longbow, the French were quick to utilise the crossbow as their missile weapon of choice in the Hundred Years' War. A complicated weapon, the crossbow's bow was reinforced with horn and sinew, meaning it would pack a large punch for its size. Stirrups at the front end of the bow were used to secure the crossbow during loading, where the string would be secured to the trigger mechanism by crouching, fastening it to a hook on the user's belt and then standing up. This would leave the archer vulnerable, and crossbowmen often carried a pavise (a large shield worn on the soldier's back) during battle for protection.

Usually able to match ranges with the longbow, the crossbow provided intense armour penetration power. Able to pierce plate armour at 200 yards, the crossbow was the bane of armoured warriors during the Medieval period, so much so that Pope Innocent III called for them to be banned in the Second Lateran Council, although this might have been as much to do with not killing other Christians than the weapon being overpowered.

The advantage of the crossbow was its ease of use and stopping power. Relatively little training, especially compared to the longbow, was needed to master the weapon. Being able to have a low-born warrior go toe-to-toe with a fully trained and armoured knight and come out on top could be a huge advantage. To offset this, the rate of fire of around four bolts per minute meant that the archers could become exposed.

An ancient cross-bow weapon at Bamburgh Castle, Northumberland


Archers could use a winch mechanism to help them reload

These English cannons were abandoned by Thomas Scales during the failed siege of Mont Saint-Michel in 1434

Cannon 14th century

England/France/Burgundy/Scotland

When cannons first appeared on the battlefields of France they were not the game-changers they would grow to be. However, their development and effectiveness increased steadily throughout the 14th century and exploded in the 15th century. Key changes made to the design and manufacture of the guns made them formidable. The first cannons used were a lot shorter and stubbier, and so lengthening the barrels increased power, accuracy and range. The longer barrels also helped with loading and increased the rate of fire. The final improvement was in metallurgy and experimentation with different metals and compounds, which greatly increased a cannon's strength and how easy it was to cast.

These marked improvements can be seen in the number of cannons used in the conflict. In 1382–88, the English crown purchased 87 cannons. By 1409 it was agreed that around 250 guns were needed to take a stronghold, a massive increase in a very short space of time.

A handgun barrel in between two small cannons, all from the 15th century

Handgonne 14th century (Europe)

England/France

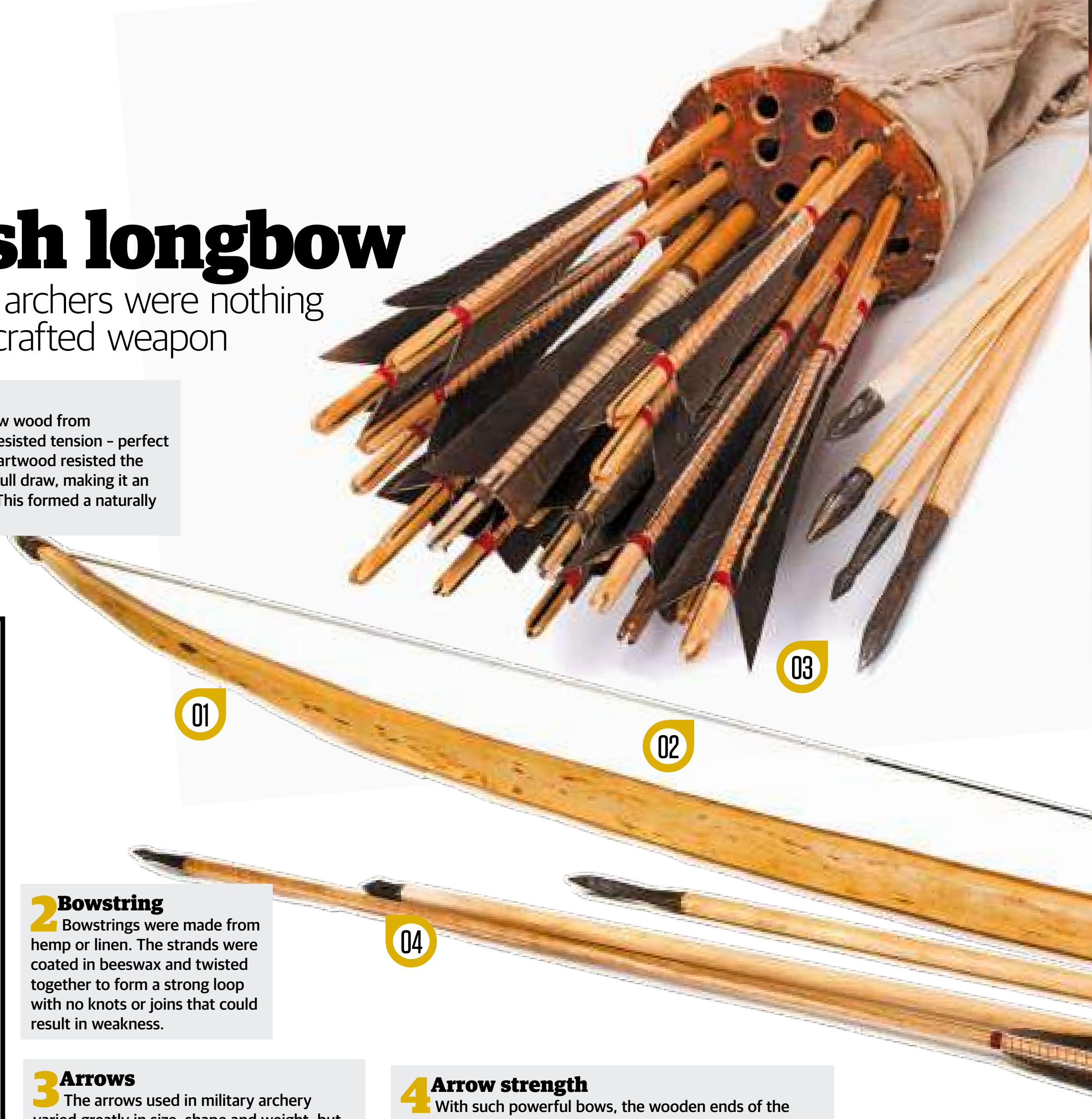
Developed alongside cannons, handgonnes (or handguns) were becoming more prevalent during the Hundred Years' War. In its simplest form it consisted of a tube of metal that was either attached to the end of a pole or a crossbow-like stock. Like the cannon, they used gunpowder that, when ignited, shot a lead or metal pellet at the enemy. The noise and confusion caused by these weapons would have probably been more effective than the projectile. Longer barrels introduced in the 15th century helped with power and accuracy, but they were far from replacing bows as an army's main missile weapon during warfare.

Despite their limitations, handguns did see increased use only a few years after their introduction. Jean Froissart makes a claim that 400 handguns, also known as hackbuts or hagbuts, were used by the English at the Siege of St Malo, a not inconsequential number for the period.

The British longbow

King Henry's fearsome archers were nothing without their expertly crafted weapon

1 Bow
A Medieval war bow was usually made of yew wood from Europe. The thin layer of living outer sapwood resisted tension – perfect for the flat 'back' of the bow. The dead inner heartwood resisted the massive compressive forces acting against it at full draw, making it an ideal timber for the rounded 'belly' of the bow. This formed a naturally occurring spring.



English longbow

DRAW WEIGHT:
UP TO 180LB

FIRING RATE:
8-10 ARROWS PER MINUTE

RANGE:
250-350 YARDS

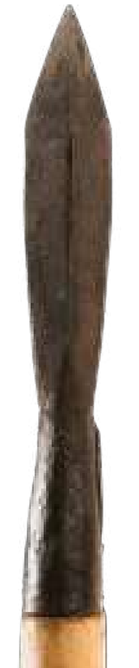
2 Bowstring
Bowstrings were made from hemp or linen. The strands were coated in beeswax and twisted together to form a strong loop with no knots or joins that could result in weakness.

3 Arrows
The arrows used in military archery varied greatly in size, shape and weight, but the average length was 30 inches. Often half an inch thick at the point, they were armed with hand-forged steel heads, each designed to do a specific job.

4 Arrow strength
With such powerful bows, the wooden ends of the arrows would often split and break on release. To protect against this, a thin sliver of flattened cow horn would be inserted into a slot cut at the base of the arrow going against the grain of the wood, thereby strengthening the arrow and preventing it splitting.

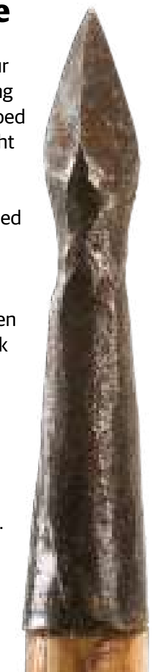
Arrowheads of the Medieval period

Take a closer look at Medieval arrowheads and find out how each was made and used



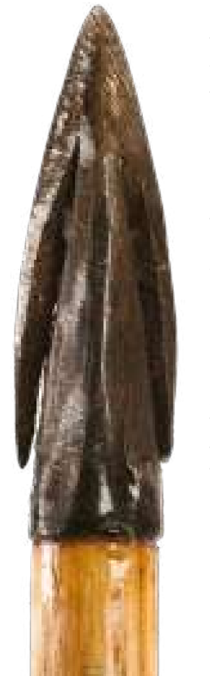
Lozenge-shape heavy bodkin

Heavy, large and with four sharpened edges, this long bodkin point was developed purely to punch holes right through the steel plate armour of soldiers. The arrowhead socket is formed from a flattened spoon shape then rolled into a cone and fitted over the wooden arrow shaft. When used with a half-inch-thick arrow weighing almost a quarter of a pound and shot from a true military war bow by an archer, this would have been the equivalent of a Medieval rocket-propelled grenade.



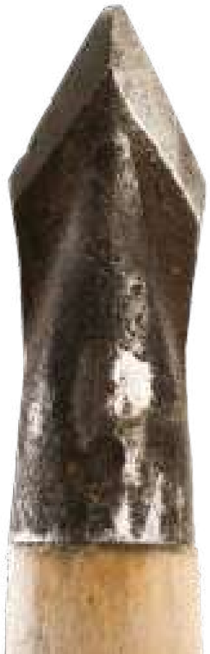
Type 10

This was perhaps the most common arrowhead of the war as it was simple and fast to make and highly effective against the armour of the period. The Type 10 was a simple bodkin – a four-sided point and a rolled socket. Forged by a master arrowsmith, this was the evolution of the needle-bodkin arrowhead. As chainmail armour gave way to plate armour, the Type 10 arrowhead found its way into the Medieval arms race.



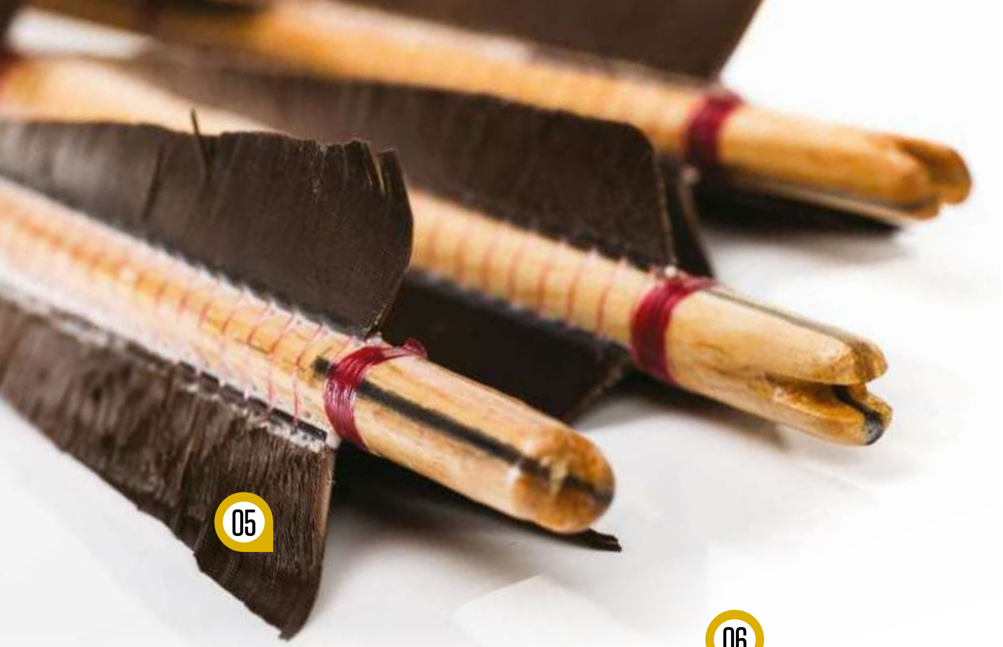
Type 16

This arrowhead has a very distinct difference from the bodkins. It contained barbs on either side, which made it incredibly difficult to remove from whichever target it may have pierced. The barbs would most likely have been fire welded to the head separately. The popularity of such a head is unknown, but surviving examples of Type 16s do surface from time to time. This may have been a military-adapted version of a hunting head.

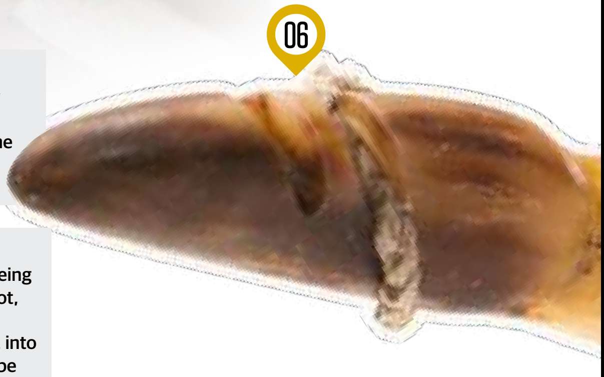


Tudor bodkin

As with the Type 10, this arrowhead would also have been cheap and fast to produce. According to master arrowsmith Mark Stretton, once the socket has been formed in the usual way, the red-hot arrowhead is placed into a press, or 'swage', which is then hammered shut. The corners are then cut and ground to produce the sharpened edges. This type of head would have been mostly ineffective against plate armour but would pierce many types of textile armour, such as padded gambesons.



5 Fletchings
The flights or 'fletchings' of the arrow were made of goose, swan or peacock feathers. The feathers were fastened to the arrow shaft using animal skin glues and bound firmly in place with silk.

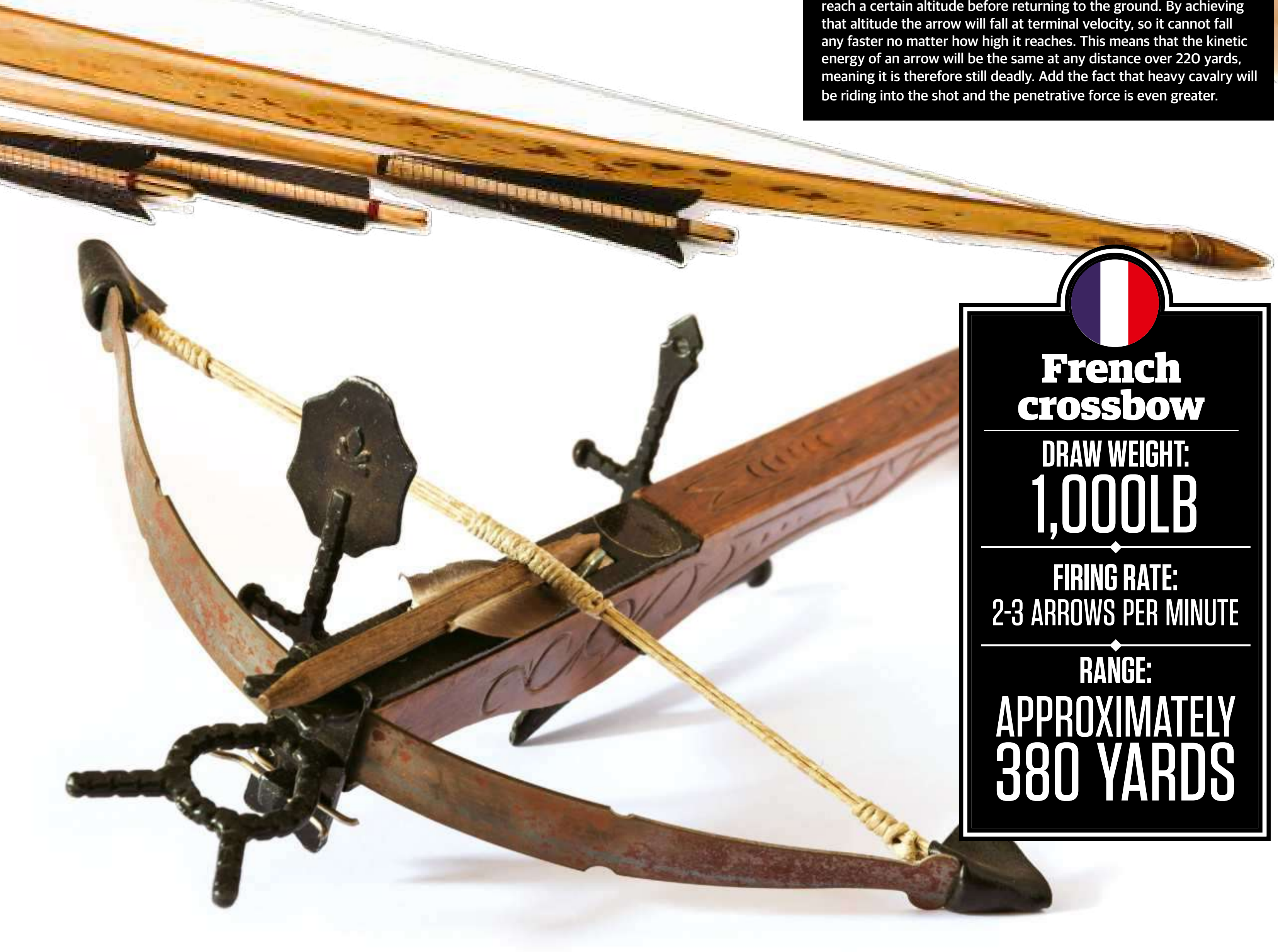


6 Nocks
To protect the soft yew wood from being damaged by the bowstring when being shot, the tips of cattle horn were used for this. These horn 'nocks' had a single groove cut into one side, into which the bowstring would be looped or tied.

Why were longbows so deadly?

War bow expert Mark Stretton explains the lethal range at which longbowmen could strike their enemy

An arrow fired at point-blank range or from around ten to 20 yards is going to be the most lethal for penetrative impact, as the arrow will not have lost any velocity at such a short distance but will have straightened up enough to be able to hit its target square on, giving the maximum delivery of energy. However, there is no maximum lethal range if the arrow can be shot over 220-240 yards. The reason for this is that once the arrow had gone over 220 yards, it would then impact with the same force as if it was shot at 40 yards. At 40 yards, the arrow does not have quite the same energy as at ten yards, but there is hardly any difference and it's still lethal. The reason for this is simple. For the arrow to be able to make a distance of over 220 yards it must be shot at a 43-degree trajectory, which then means that it will reach a certain altitude before returning to the ground. By achieving that altitude the arrow will fall at terminal velocity, so it cannot fall any faster no matter how high it reaches. This means that the kinetic energy of an arrow will be the same at any distance over 220 yards, meaning it is therefore still deadly. Add the fact that heavy cavalry will be riding into the shot and the penetrative force is even greater.



French crossbow

DRAW WEIGHT:
1,000LB

FIRING RATE:
2-3 ARROWS PER MINUTE

RANGE:
APPROXIMATELY 380 YARDS

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Medieval fight club

The tournament grand mêlée was a testosterone-filled brawl fuelled by promises of glory and wealth

When we hear of tournaments, we immediately conjure up romantic images of knights in armour, minstrels singing of brave deeds and fair maidens handing out favours. The reality, however, was quite different. Long before Arthurian theatrics, tournaments were a brutal battleground, lacking the style and substance of later games and served an important purpose in life.

The tournament has become a catchall term for a Medieval martial gathering, which actually featured multiple different events, with the two principle ones being the grand mêlée and the joust; the hallmark of the event in our imagination. But when they first became popular, it was the grand mêlée that drew in the spectators and participants, with the joust only rising to prominence in the 14th century. These events, while providing exciting and brutal entertainment to their spectators, were important for military training and personal wealth and prestige.

> The rise of tournaments coincided with the changing nature of Medieval European warfare

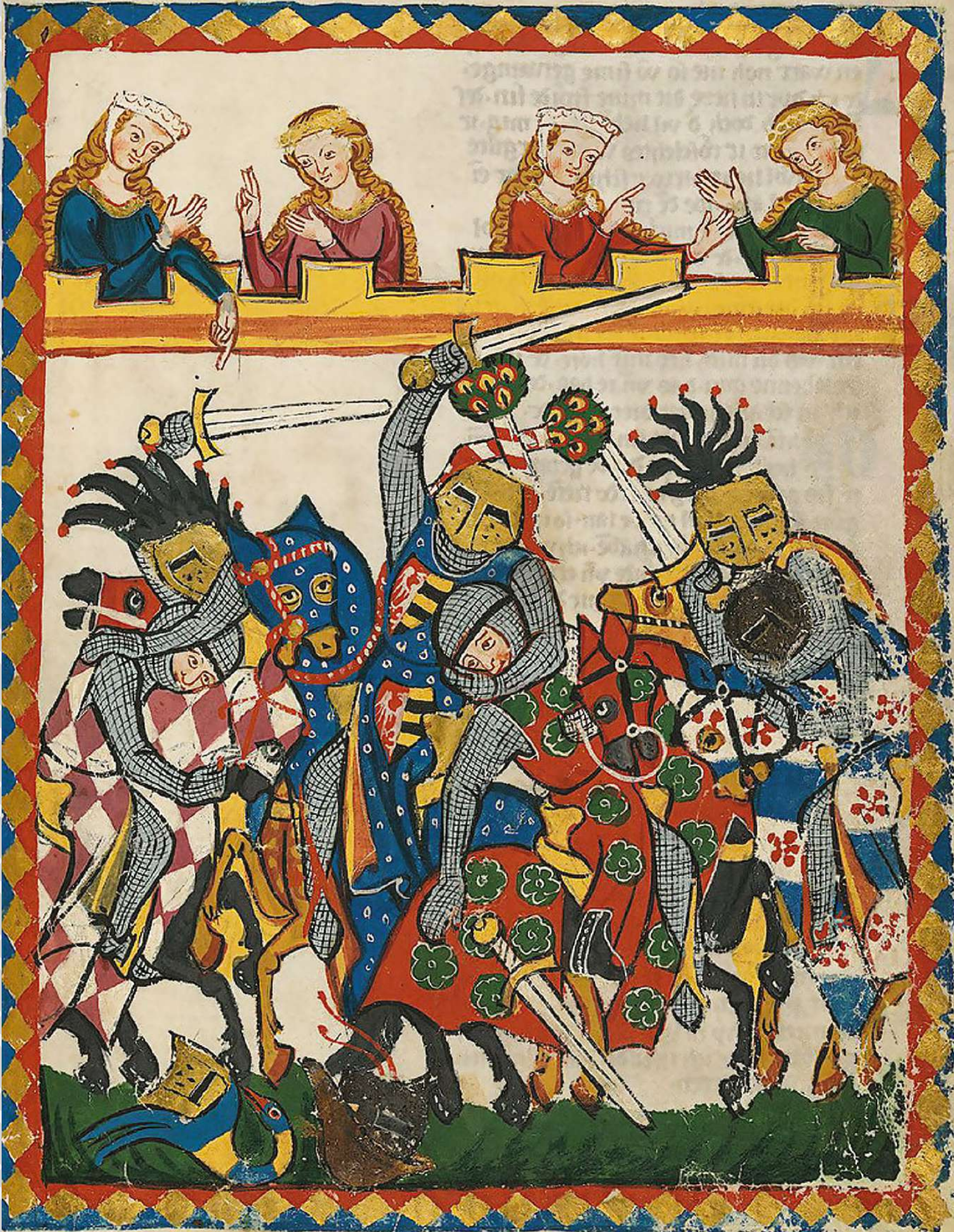
The rise of tournaments coincided with the changing nature of Medieval European warfare. Gone were the sluggish, heavy infantry of late antiquity and replacing them were more mobile, heavy cavalry. The couched lance, a new technical innovation, now allowed for much more hard-hitting cavalry changes. In lieu of enemies to fight, tournaments served as an excellent way to mimic a real battle. It was said that a man couldn't be considered a true knight until he saw "his blood flow and heard his teeth crack under the fist of his adversary" - the mêlée gave men just that opportunity.

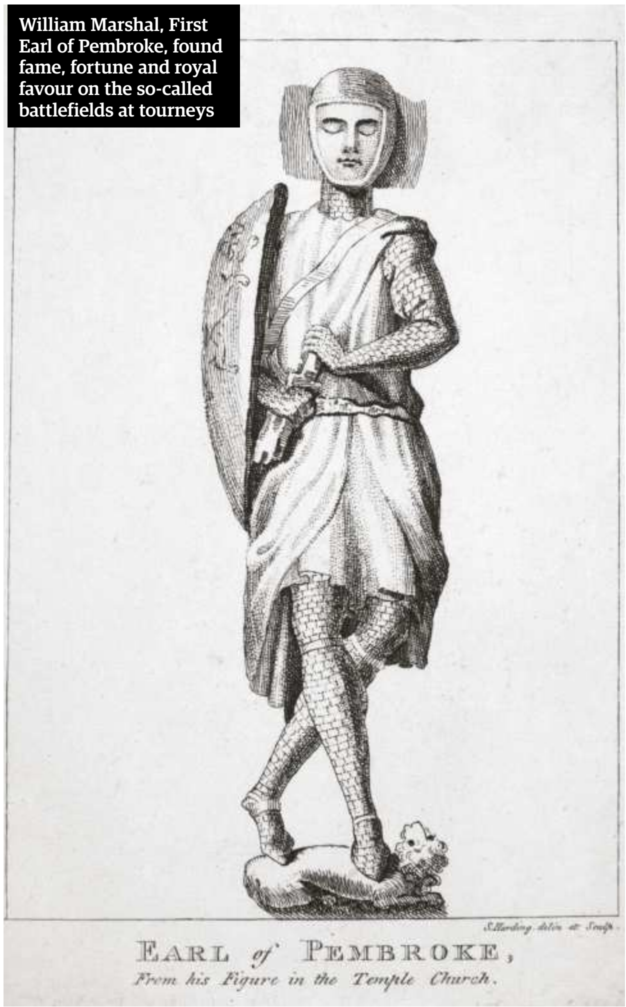
Military games and exercises are as old as warfare, and the tournament was the best training a European warrior could receive. Although a uniquely Medieval event, it has its origins in antiquity. Funeral games from the classical world, such as those featured in Virgil's Aeneid, boasted mock battles where teams of horsemen would manoeuvre around each other in formation, usually followed by a dressage-style display. These theatrical performances look to have served as the kernel of team training that would become central to a tournament's draw and purpose.

Charlemagne's grandsons, Charles the Bald and Louis the German, in their meeting for the Treaty of Verdun in 842, acted out similar displays. Here the two nobles would gather their mounted followers and speed back and forth across the field, carrying out charges, retreats and defences they would usually employ in the heat of battle. Although Virgil's story and the treaty took place hundreds of years apart, the display of military tactics and training - in themselves displays of skilled horsemanship - by opposing factions remained constant. Even though these precursors were non-violent displays, they would serve as the basis for the growth of the tournament from the 11th century onwards.

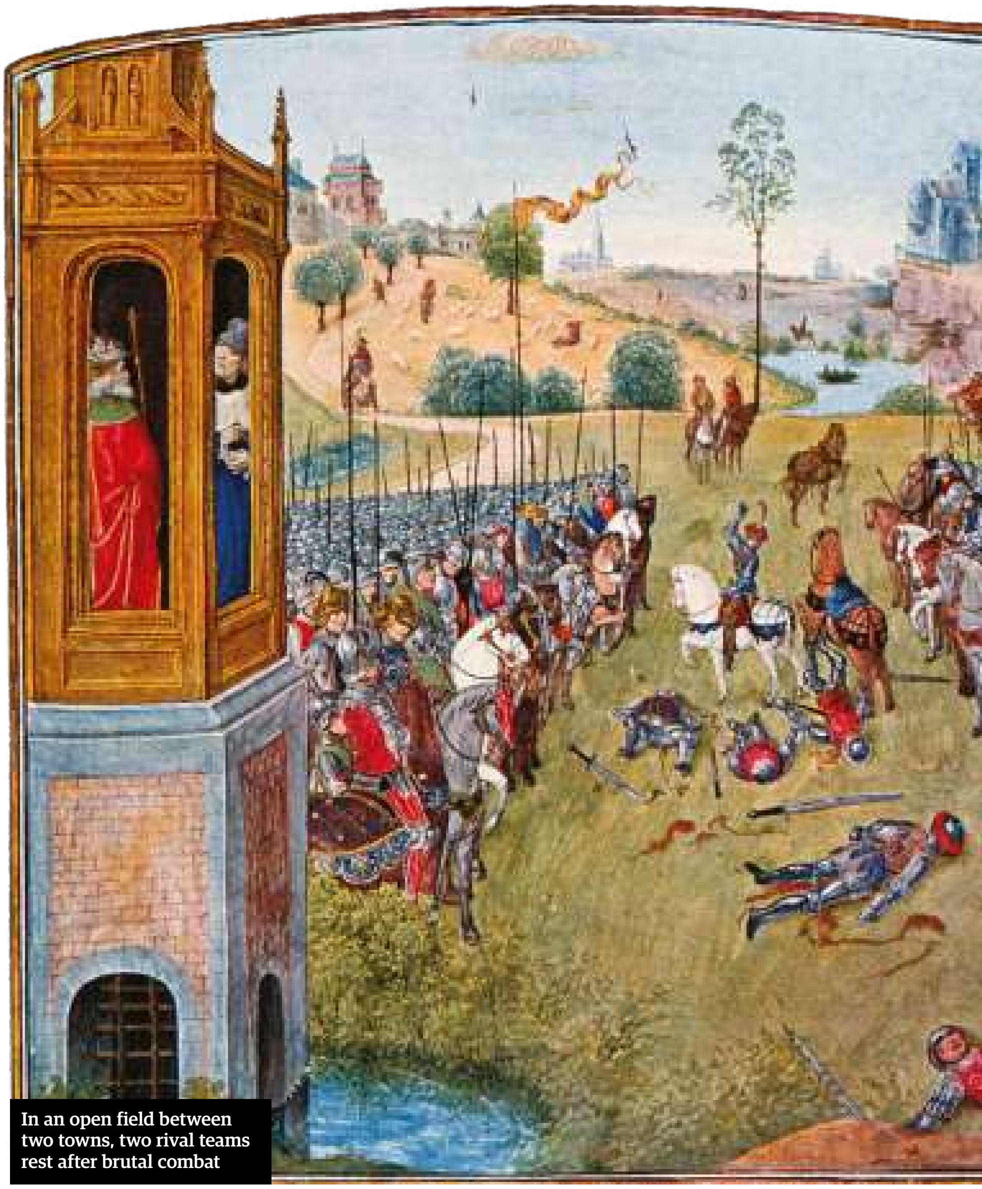
This is the century where we find the first reference to what we recognise as a tournament. With Sicily and Anjou touted as the locations, tournaments rose to prominence in mainland Europe - but it's not impossible that any were held earlier; we just don't have the records.

The grand mêlée would have been the centre point of these early events, with members of the nobility and their retinues




S.Harding delin et Sculp.
EARL of PEMBROKE,
From his Figure in the Temple Church.

William Marshal, First Earl of Pembroke, found fame, fortune and royal favour on the so-called battlefields at tourneys



In an open field between two towns, two rival teams rest after brutal combat

of mounted warriors making up the participants. These potentially massive team battles saw two groups of knights draw up facing each other in a single line and repeatedly charging each other, trying to unhorse the opposition. To have any more than one battle line would leave the combatants very vulnerable to trampling after the initial charge. The act of consolidating after a charge may have lent the tournament its name, as the word has its origins in the French 'to turn'. Once a suitable number of men were unhorsed, the mêlée would then descend into a vicious ground-level scrap, with the objective being the capture of individual members of the opposite team for ransom. Holding pens for captured knights were constructed near the battleground and knights would be honour-bound to stay there until the fight was over – although it wasn't unknown for less honourable individuals to sneak out and rejoin the fight.

Tournaments were often held on borderlands of disputed territory and could serve to take the place of real battles to settle arguments between quarrelling nobility. The mock battles usually took place over several miles of open countryside filled with rivers, woods, buildings and vineyards; a more realistic combat setting to the later, more regimented events. This set the scene for flanking manoeuvres and ambushes, forcing each team to think tactically and as a unit. Not counting the very vague geographical boundaries and an area for beaten knights to gather, there was very little in the way of rules and regulations. Relying on the other team's 'sporting nature' is about as far as official rules went, as there were no referees present. Ranged weapons such as bows and crossbows were used, along with a long list of hand-to-hand weapons including lances, swords, axes and maces.

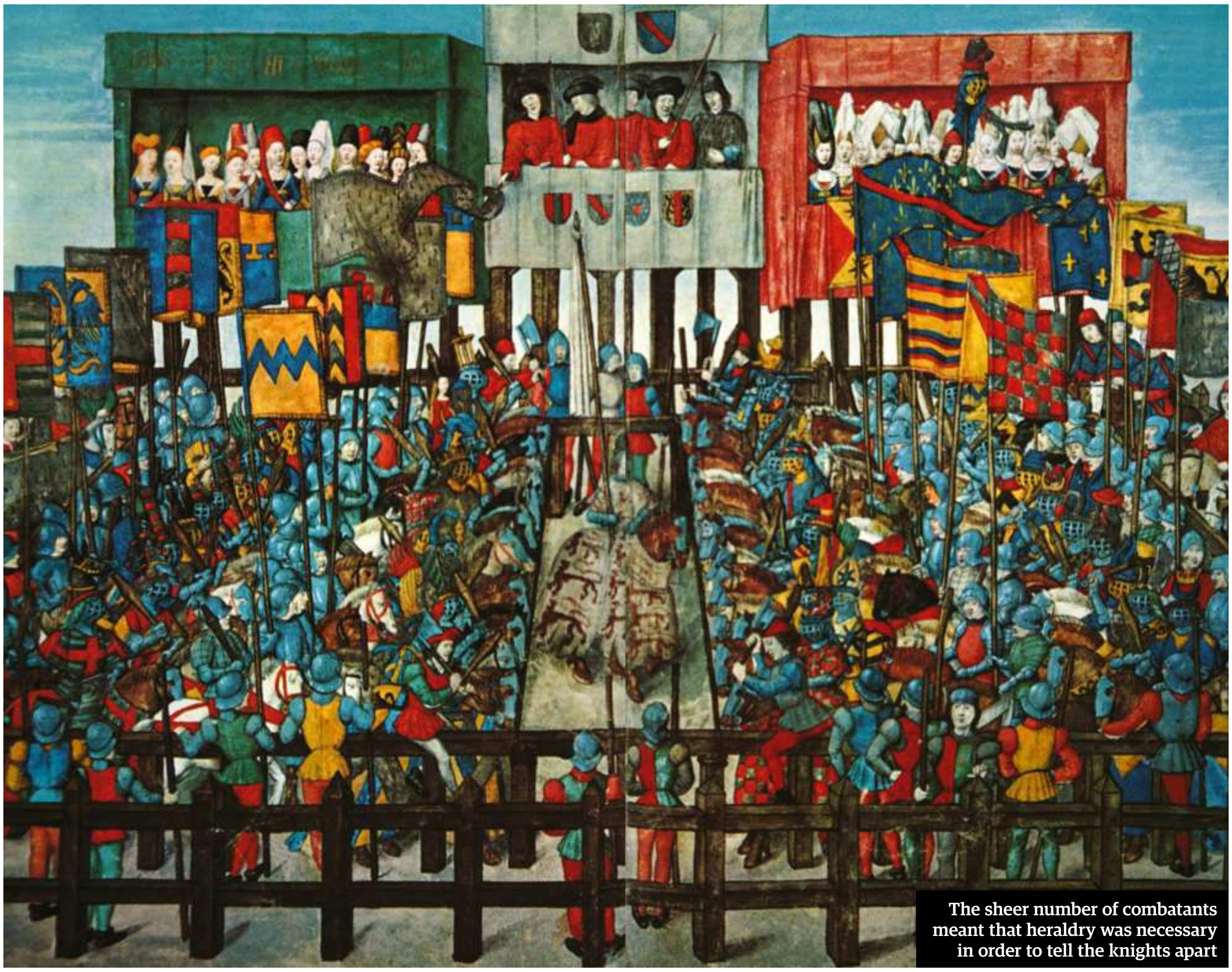
With lax rules and real, edged weapons in play, participants could expect more than a bloody nose or a few knocks and bumps. Serious injury and death were a knight's constant companion during these mêlées. This danger may have prompted the fighters to play fair as there were several instances of some knights losing vital parts of their armour while still being attacked, making the games all the more deadly.

As well as real injuries, real tactics were also employed. Count Philip of Flanders was known for holding back his troops from the fight until the opponents were tired, and then, to 'charge into the mêlée at the head of his mesnie and take many valuable prisoners at small risk to his own men'. Although a very effective tactic, the use of it had Philip's leadership and honour brought into question, the former perhaps unfairly, as he usually emerged victorious.

It wasn't unusual for a tournament to last several days to allow good time for all the festivities. The grand mêlée usually lasted an entire day, with breaks for rest and the dealing with captured fighters. The rise of the joust saw more time added onto the average tournament but the mêlée was always saved for last, presumably due to the high number of injuries expected.

Tournaments weren't just violent and dangerous to our modern viewpoint, as contemporary chroniclers commented on the brutal nature of the mêlée as well: "No effort is made to mitigate the effect of the sharp weapons; a spear pins shield to arm and arm to side, ears and arms are lopped off, and bodies transfixed so that the lance, pennon and all, stands out six feet beyond." Accounts of knights leaving the tourney scene after a traumatic fight shouldn't surprise us; these events took their toll even on those hardened to their nature.

So if these contests were so dangerous, why were people flocking to enter? Was the joy of



The sheer number of combatants meant that heraldry was necessary in order to tell the knights apart

combat enough of a draw for some knights? A tournament mirrored Medieval warfare in that killing a high-ranking opponent was a bad business move. Instead, capturing and ransoming a knight with his equipment could be very lucrative, especially for younger men looking to establish a name for themselves.

> “The host would usually shower gifts on the winners of the mêlée”

As well as ransoming, the tournament host would usually shower expensive gifts on the winners of the mêlée. While boosting the reputation of the recipients, great displays of wealth served also to not so subtly remind people of the power and wealth of the host. The tournament also served to offer a distraction to men who might not stand to inherit holdings from their fathers, sometimes called ‘aristocratic vagabonds’. These men, who might cause trouble or incite rebellion if left to their own devices, now had an outlet for aggression and a chance to forge their own paths in life. This applied to both the wealthy and impoverished knights and could lead to rags-to-riches stories at the time, like in the case of William Marshal.

Universally considered the greatest knight of his age, Marshal, born in 1146, began his career as an impoverished squire at 23 when he joined the French tournament circuit. When he died, he had faithfully served five English Kings, became regent of England under the young Henry III and remained the only man ever to have beaten Richard the Lionheart in a joust. This meteoric rise in fame and wealth started in the mêlée.

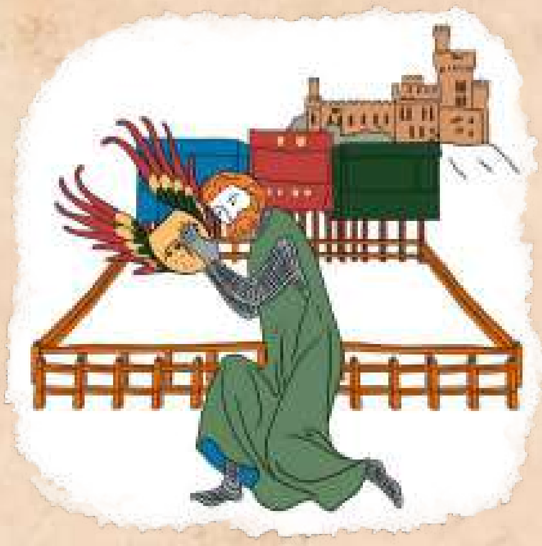
Accounts of his conduct show his express purpose to capture the enemy in a bid to make his fortune: “[William] wasted no time in getting about the business of the day. Attacking Philip de Valognes… he seized his horse by the reins and forced him out of the mêlée. Then after taking Philip’s pledge that he would pay his ransom, William returned to the combat and captured two more knights. Each of the captured knights was forced to surrender all his equipment. William gained war horses, palfreys, arms and armour for his own use, roncins for his servants and sumpter horses for his baggage.” His perseverance and the capture of knight after knight meant that in 1179 he was able to enter the tournament as a knight and “although still a landless man, he had risen to the point where he could flaunt his banner beside those of counts and barons.”

However, even for a seasoned warrior like William Marshal, the mêlée was still a very dangerous place. As a famous knight he would attract many opponents hoping to claim his wealth and had some close calls. He was once awarded the prize for best fighter, but due to his absence the ceremony was postponed. He was later found in the blacksmith with his head on an anvil, having his warped helmet beaten back into shape so it could be removed.

To help aspiring knights make a name for themselves, a herald would be on hand. Having an almost encyclopedic knowledge of the participants’ coats of arms, the herald’s job was to identify and recall the deeds of knights for the spectators among horses and lances.

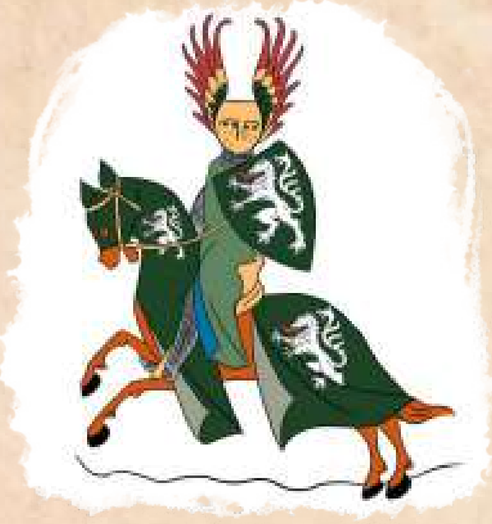
How to fight on the field of mock battle

Mount your horse and prepare yourself for high Medieval mayhem



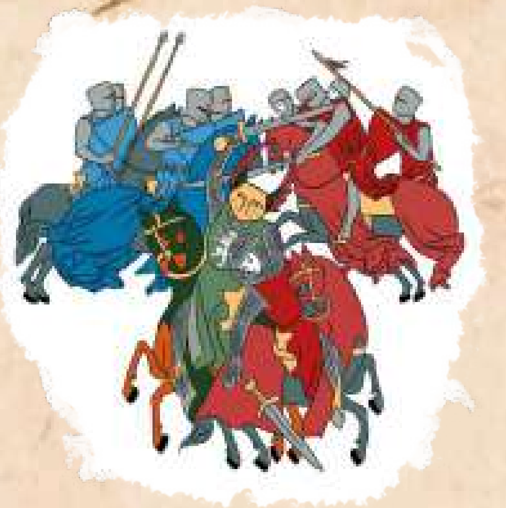
1 Swear allegiance

As a young, eager knight ready to show your mettle, you decide to attend a tournament thrown by your liege lord. As part of his household guard, the tournament provides an excellent training ground for you and your fellow warriors to fight together and hone your military skills to a fine (or blunted) point. So don your armour and mount your horse, the battle is about to commence.



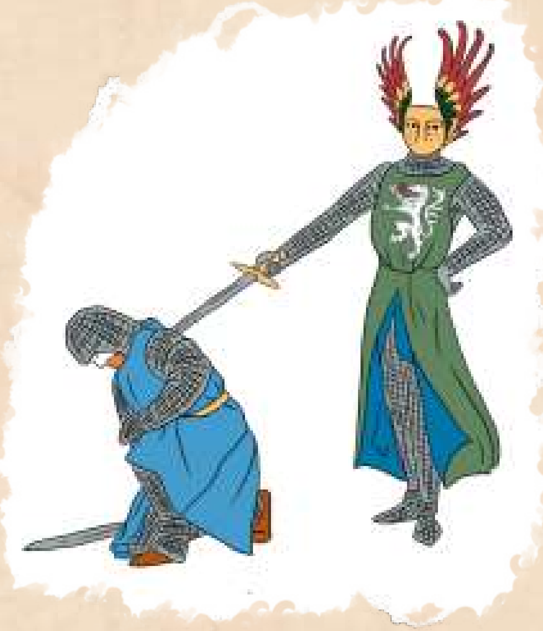
2 Choose your heraldry

With your face hidden under all that armour, how are people going to recognise your brave deeds in battle? What you need is heraldry, an aesthetic device that once applied to your shield, crest, surcoat, lance and horse trapper, will make you instantly recognisable and hopefully famous. Feel free to incorporate animals or objects into the design for added flair. Remember to let the herald know who you are so you get the introduction you deserve.



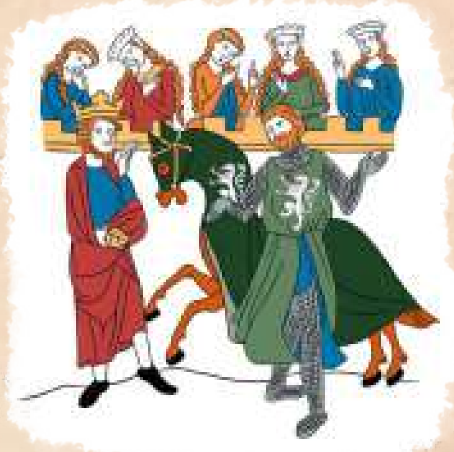
3 Enter the fray

Once you look the part and the battle is beginning, it's now time to put those years of military training to the test. Riding with the rest of your squadron, your objective is to force the opposing side into submission or put them to flight. Cavalry formations are deadly on the charge, so make sure you take the initiative and try and catch the enemy flat footed. If you have any grudges against a particular enemy, now is the time to settle the score.



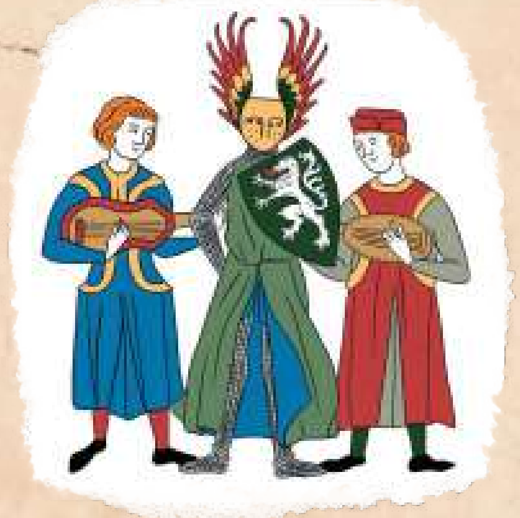
4 Gather your ransom

The battle is won, and even better, an enemy knight has surrendered to you, but what to do with him? Simply releasing your rich and powerful opponents is just bad business; why not ransom them back to their own faction for a hefty sum? The more prestigious the captive, the larger the payout!



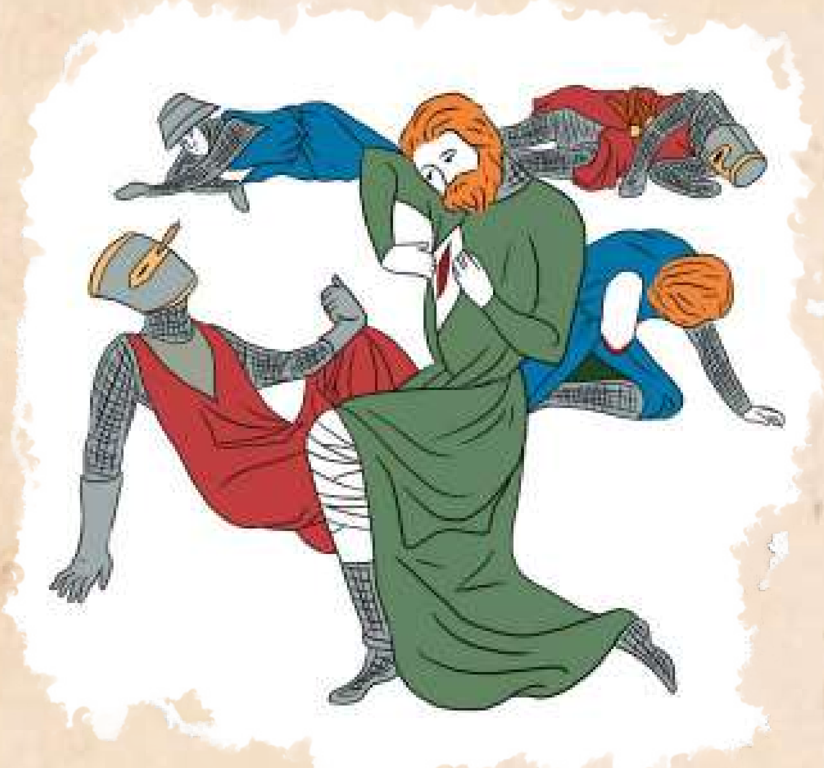
5 Revel in the glory

Tournaments could be lucrative events, and not just for the potential ransoms to be had. Holding a tournament takes great wealth, and any noble who does is going to make sure everyone remembers it. Gifts for the victors are not uncommon and depending where you fight in Europe, you could find yourself showered in gold, silver, horses and other finery. If you are lucky enough to receive these gifts you might just attract the eye of a few ladies in waiting as well.



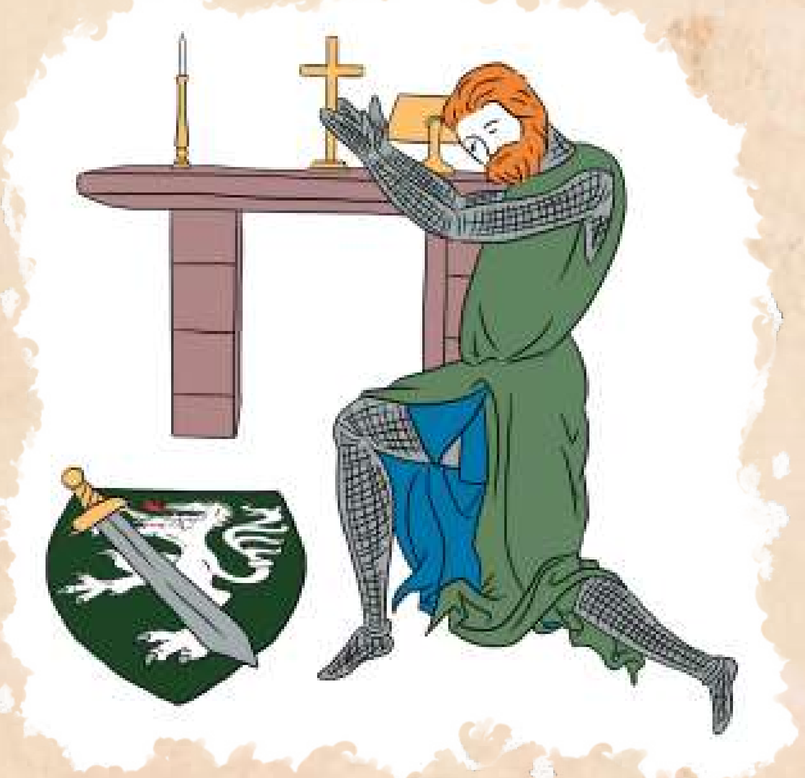
6 Sing your praises

Once people have noticed your grand deeds and you've cashed in your captives, it's time to let the rest of the world know about your martial prowess. By either hiring a minstrel or penning the ballad yourself, your name and deeds will be immortalised, ready to echo throughout the ages.



7 No rest for the wicked

Even victory is physically taxing, with serious injury or even death being part and parcel of entering the fight. What's more, you might find the event stretching on for several days, so make sure you address any aches and pains on the rest days so you'll always be at your best.



8 Time for confession

The thrill of combat and the spilling of blood might excite you, but remember it's taking a toll on your immortal soul. The papacy disapproves of these violent life choices and to continue participating you'll have to flaunt the bans put in place in the 12th and 13th century. If you choose to do so, be ready for some harsh penalties.

While the lure of prestige was an obvious draw, many highborn lords and Kings enjoyed the games too. Edward I was a famous patron and threw himself into the event. His enthusiasm for Arthurian legend and the martial aspects ensured that the tournament was popular during his reign, but had the presence of mind to use boiled leather and whalebone weapons to limit the inevitable injuries.

Using blunted weapons would become the norm in Edward's reign, with the Statute of Arms being enacted in c.1292. This decree enforced the use of blunted weapons in a bid to reduce the number of casualties and deaths: "No knight or squire serving at the tournament shall bear a sword pointed, or dagger pointed, or staff or mace, but only a broad sword for tourneying. And all shall be armed with mufflers and vuishes, and shoulder plates, and a skull-cap, without more." It also stated that a fallen knight could only be helped to his feet by his own squire bearing his heraldic device and that only authorised personnel could carry weapons when not competing. Ignoring these new rules would likely see the offender stripped of his horse and equipment and sent to enjoy the King's hospitality in prison. As well as the renewed safety of the participants, the general public could also feel safer as the restriction on carrying weapons no doubt made the area surrounding a tournament much safer. Poorer knights, who could not compete with rich nobles in equipment, no doubt welcomed the standardisation of weapons and armour. While more wealth would obviously mean better equipment, it wasn't unknown for important or wealthy figures to be swarmed by a whole group of treasure-seeking knights during the grand mêlée.

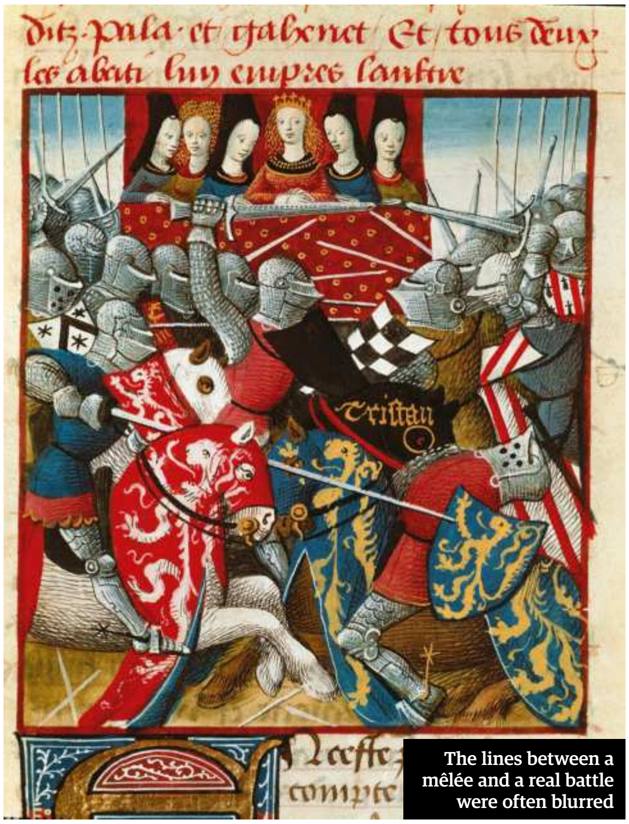
> "He was found with his head on an anvil having his helmet removed"

The church had opposed tournaments from the start; Christian-on-Christian violence never sat well with them. Also unhappy were European secular authorities, as local communities grew uneasy whenever large bands of well-armed men congregated near their homes. So tourney goers had to contend with French and English Kings passing periodic bans to try and maintain public order.

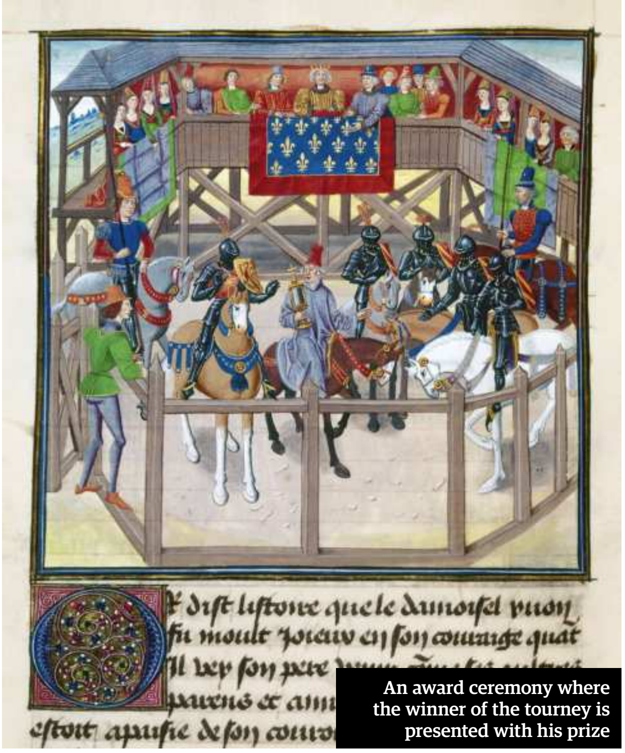
With this threat of wider violence during a tournament, it was becoming clear to the European nobility that they needed better policing. By the 13th century, England had established a committee of five earls whose job was to set up and administer rules for the tournament. These men made it their prerogative to reduce the number of disturbances caused by unruly squires or spectators.

In the face of the new rulings and Papal anger, illicit tournaments began to spring up around all Europe. Even Princes like the future King Edward I, fighting tourney bans under his father, had to travel to France in order to participate. Illegal tournaments also served as meeting places for disgruntled nobles and could hide the build up of troops. After the signing of Magna Carta in 1215, rebel barons used

> "Illegal tournaments also served as meeting places for disgruntled nobles"



The lines between a mêlée and a real battle were often blurred



An award ceremony where the winner of the tourney is presented with his prize

tournaments to consolidate their forces and reignite rebellion against King John.

While the authorities might look down on these frantic games, their participants were as eager as ever. The troubadour tourney-goer Peire Vidal highlights the personal glory that stood to be won during the games. "Many a good tourney have I taken part in with the deadly blows I strike, for I can nowhere without men crying out 'this is Piere Vidal… who loves battles and tourneys more than a monk loves peace, and grows sick of resting and remaining too long in one place'."

This fame drove many of the knights, both rich and poor, into the arms of the tournament, each one hoping to improve his station. The promise of fame and fortune saw many other glowing reviews of tournaments survive: "I have always taken trouble about how I may get bolts and darts, helmets and hauberks, horses and swords, for thus do I please myself: and I take joy in assaults and tournaments, in making gifts and making love."

Throughout the 14th century, tournaments underwent a transformation as the popularity of the joust was on the rise and by the 1340s, the mêlée had almost completely died out. Less dangerous and easier for a crowd to follow, the joust had established itself as the pinnacle of knightly prowess and now reigned supreme. This change was very organic with the concepts of chivalry and courtly love evolving through the 13th and 14th century. Now the tournament resembled more of a pageant than a battle, with play acting and romance intertwined with martial displays. The brutal mêlée had no place in these more refined games.

This is not to say that the danger had diminished and the threat of death or serious injury remained. Famously Henry II of France was killed when a lance splinter found its way through the eyehole in his helmet. Henry VIII's leg wound, received during a joust, was seen as the cause of his medical and mental instability in later life.

The focus on group events had now given way to individual challenges and, as with the mêlée, these jousts found their way into practical warfare. Both French and English knights would issue individual martial challenges to each other during the Hundred Years' War. Some French knights even took to wearing a diamond shape on their armour as an invitation to a duel, even in the hack-and-slash of real combat.

The dying gasps of the mêlée, although now absent from tournament records, can be seen in the Combat of the Thirty, a meeting between French and English knights in 1351. As the name suggests, 30 knights from each side duked it out in the French countryside with the lordship of Brittany as the prize. This vicious, unmounted combat came about after the English had requested the dispute be resolved by jousting, which was turned down by the French.

While chivalry and Arthurian romance were intrinsically linked to later tournaments, earlier events with the grand mêlée were much less refined. Aspects of the chivalric code could have safeguarded non-combatants and encouraged sportsmanship, but it was often just a thin veneer to mask the violence and potential wealth.

The mêlée was no place for rules or moral codes, only the toughest knights fighting for fame and wealth.

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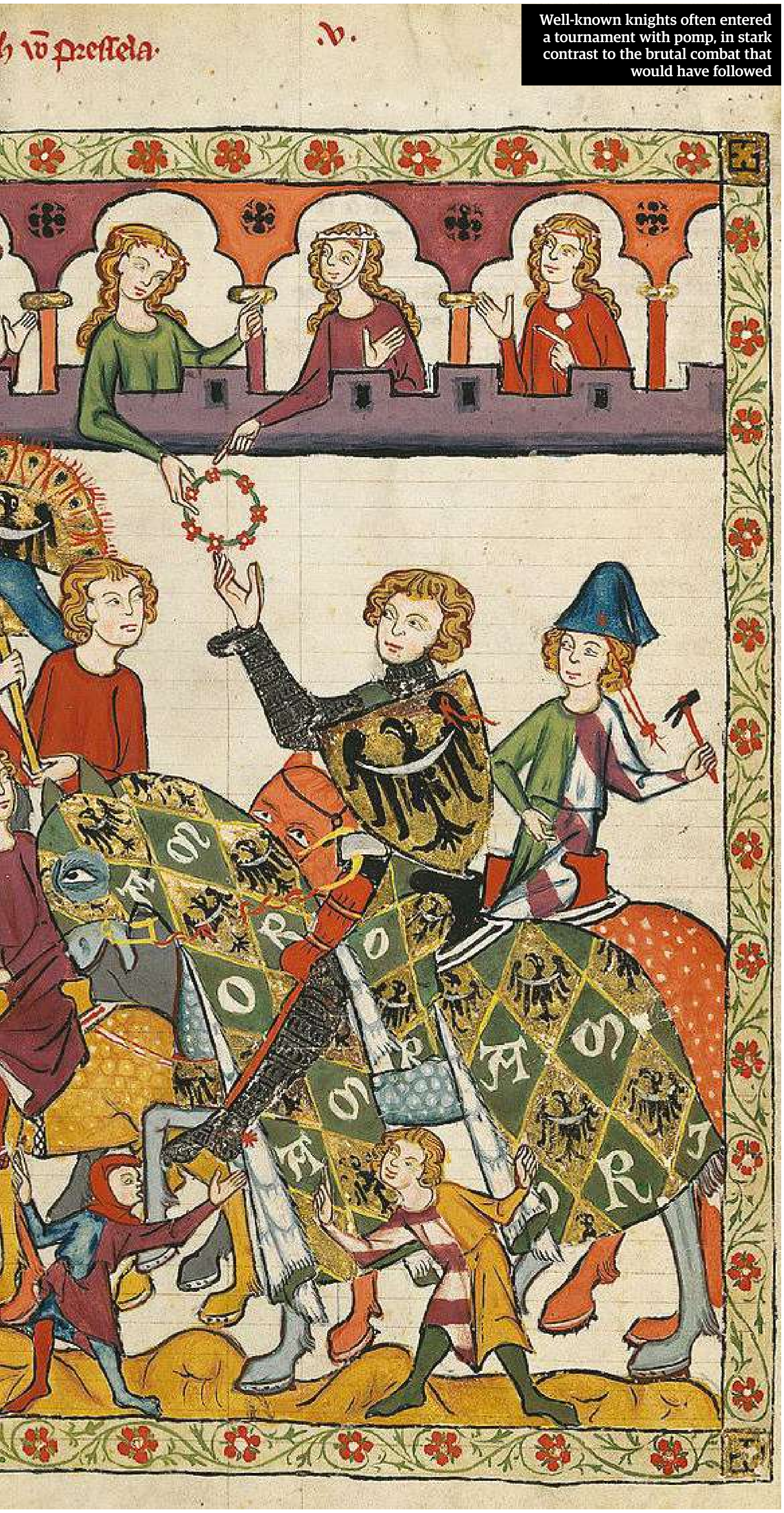
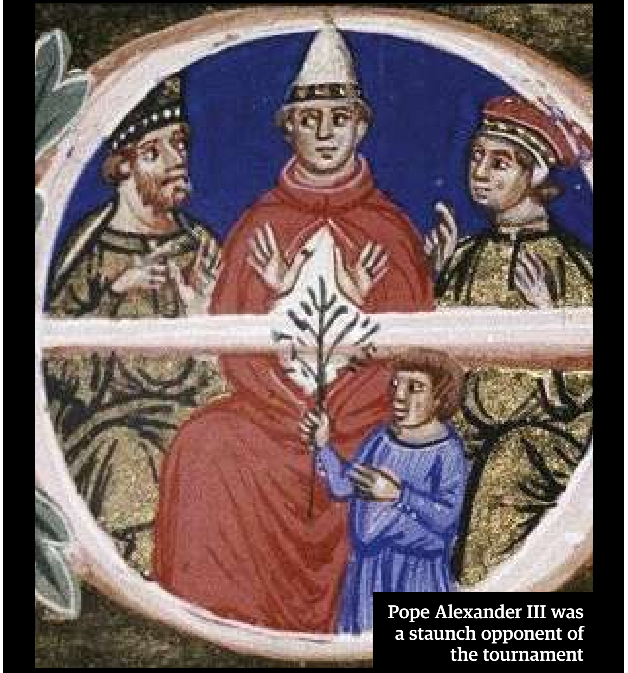


Well-known knights often entered a tournament with pomp, in stark contrast to the brutal combat that would have followed

Righteous anger

A life of violence reaps poor rewards in the afterlife



Pope Alexander III was a staunch opponent of the tournament

Church opposition to the tournament began almost immediately and only grew increasingly worse as their popularity grew in the 12th and 13th centuries. It condemned 'those detestable markets and fairs at which knights are accustomed to meet to show off their strength and their boldness'. Pope Alexander III would go further in his condemnation, warning of 'those abominable, even savage, affairs that the crowd calls tournaments'.

The Church's opposition wouldn't just end with harsh words, and they employed even harsher measures to try and curb the popularity of the tournament. Participants could be refused any number of the Church's services like confession, absolution, communion and burial on holy ground with ecclesiastical rites. To understand the gravity of this, it is important to note that Christian religion in Medieval Europe was all encompassing. Belief was strong, with beings such as angels and demons being considered real. These types of punishments would have meant eternal damnation of a knight's immortal soul.

It wasn't just the brutal mêlée that was banned either, with the last formal Papal declaration in 1312 stopping not just tournaments, but individual jousts and Arthurian Round Table celebrations as well. This ban coincided with a renewed call to arms in the Holy Land, but like the bans before it, many European knights flaunted it. The sermons at the time told that knights trapped in hell were nailed to their armour and instead of finding young women in their bed at night, lascivious toads would take their place.

But why did the Church oppose these tournaments so vehemently? Christian-on-Christian violence never sat well with the institution and the growing threat of Islam in the east prompted calls for the crusades. Having the cream of European nobility kill each other on the battle or tourney field was rather counterproductive when the Papacy needed every able-bodied Christian to help defend the Holy Land. Disruption to public order and bodies of armed men preying on the weak also served to demonise the tournament in the eyes of God. Ultimately the Church saw that it would never convince the restless elite to cease participation in tournaments completely, but their pressure did see the mêlée fall out of fashion.

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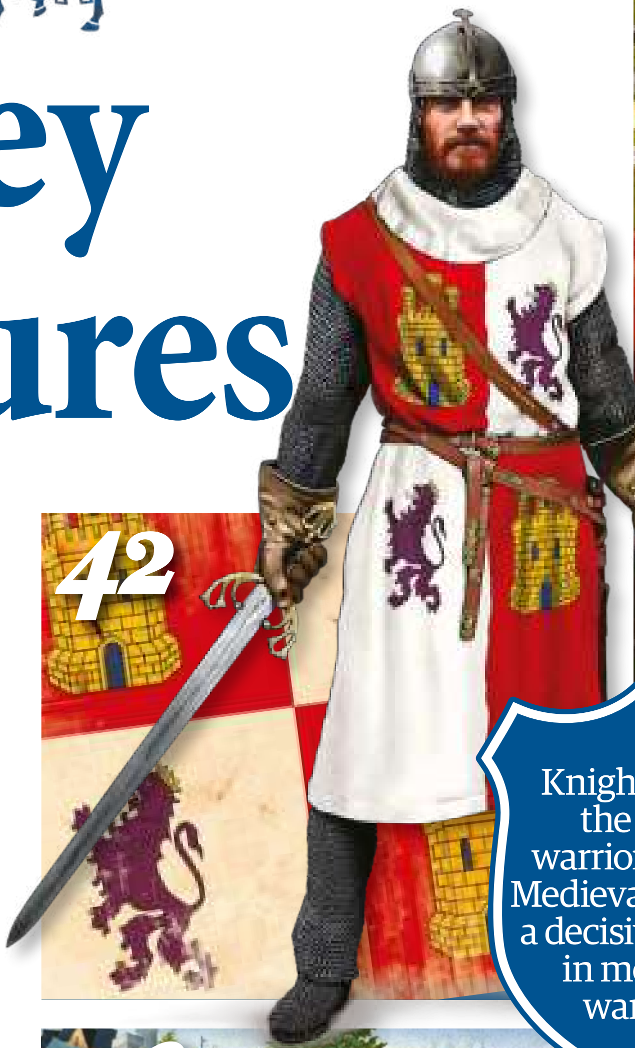

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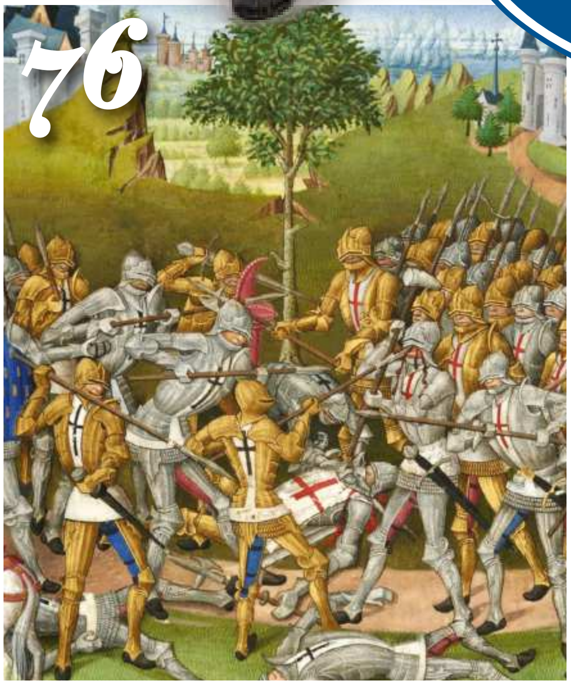
Knights were the elite warriors of the Medieval era and a decisive factor in modern warfare



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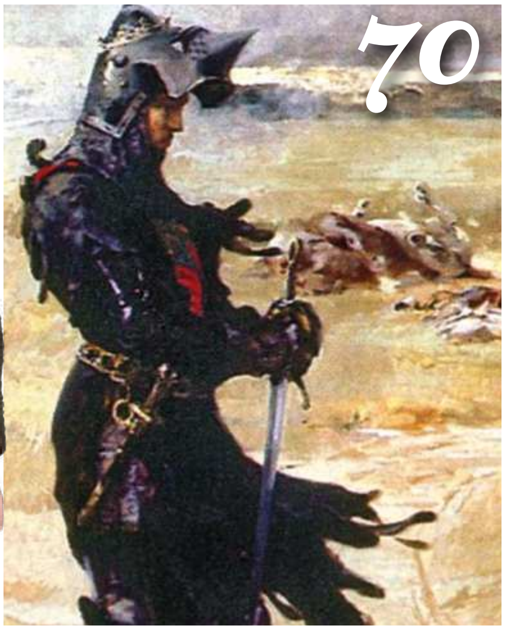

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William the Conqueror

Discover how incredible battlefield courage and brutal treatment of his enemies led the bastard of Normandy to become king of England

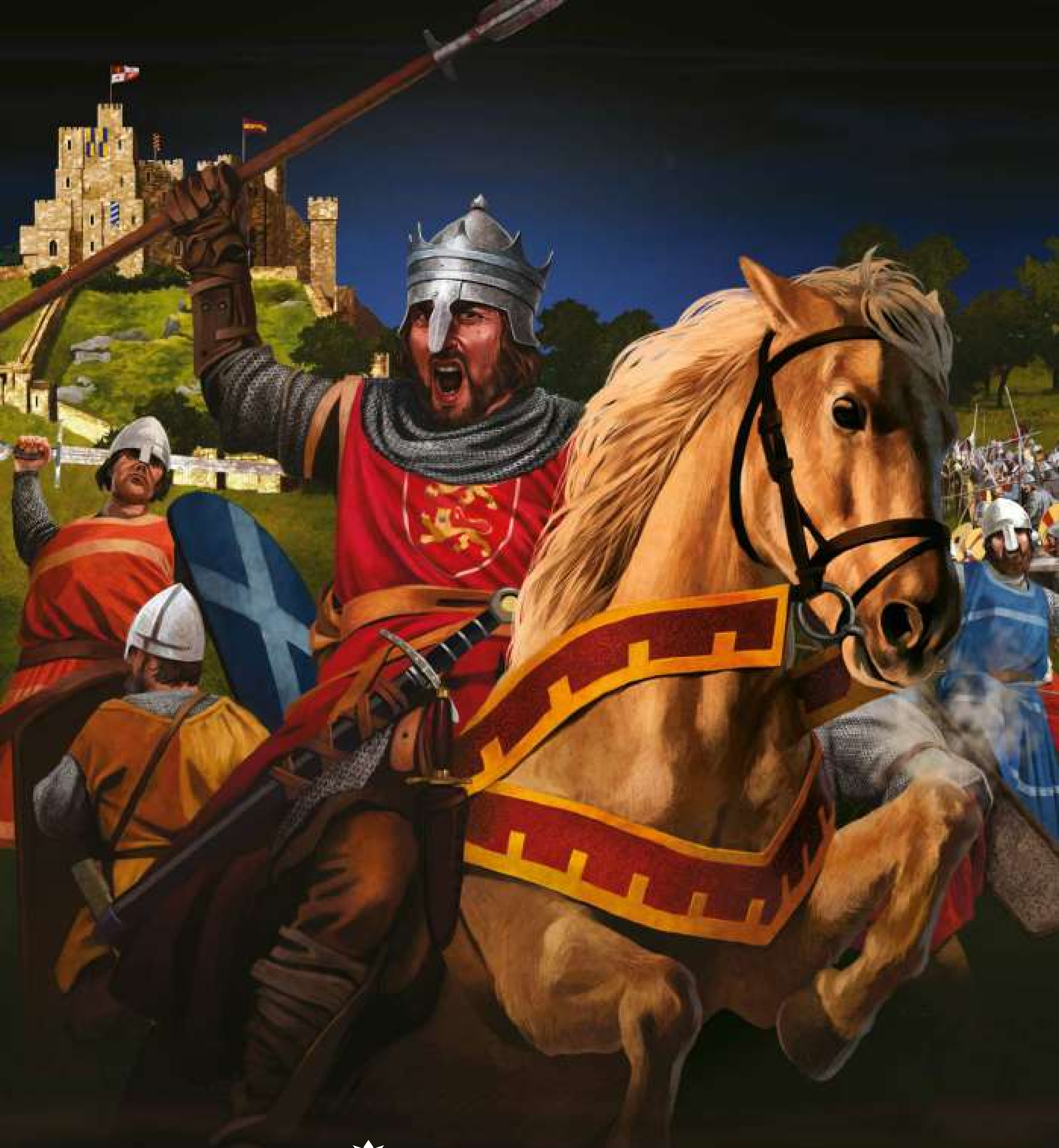
On 5 January 1066, King Edward the Confessor of England passed away without a true heir. Upon his deathbed, the dying ruler had bequeathed his throne to the most powerful man in the kingdom, Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex. The day after the king's death, Harold received the acceptance of the English magnates in London and was crowned. When word travelled across the Channel to the mainland and reached one of the most powerful nobles of northern France, he flew into a rage. William, Duke of Normandy, believed he was next in the line of succession to the English throne. Harold had stolen what did not belong to him, so as the rightful heir, the duke would do whatever it took to claim what was his; thus, he would become William the Conqueror.

The Bayeux Tapestry, which depicts William's conquest of England, is 50 centimetres tall and almost 70 metres long

40 years earlier in 1026, Count Robert of the Hiémois, William's father, looked out the window of his room at Falaise Castle to see a young woman below walking alongside the River Ante. Struck by her beauty, the count ordered his servants to bring the maiden to his bedroom that night. Her name was Herleva, the daughter of a lower-class tanner. Even if the stories were true that the count fell deeply in love with her, Herleva never became more than a concubine to Robert.

However, their relationship became much more complicated the following year on 5 August when Duke Richard III of Normandy suddenly became ill and died. As Richard's younger brother, Robert acted quickly to seize the duchy. With the support of several powerful Norman magnates, it did not take long before he became Duke Robert I. Around the same time, Herleva found out she was with child. By the end of 1028, William, the bastard son of the new duke, was born. Since Herleva was a commoner, Robert could not marry his mistress. Therefore, the duke did not immediately recognise his son, so William spent his first years at his mother's home in Guibray. Although still unwilling to make Herleva his wife, Robert eventually gave her proper respect by arranging her marriage to minor noble Herluin de Conteville. She was given even more honour when her son was proclaimed as the duke's legitimate heir; yet, this also meant that William was separated from his mother at a very young age and brought to live with his father at the castle of Falaise.

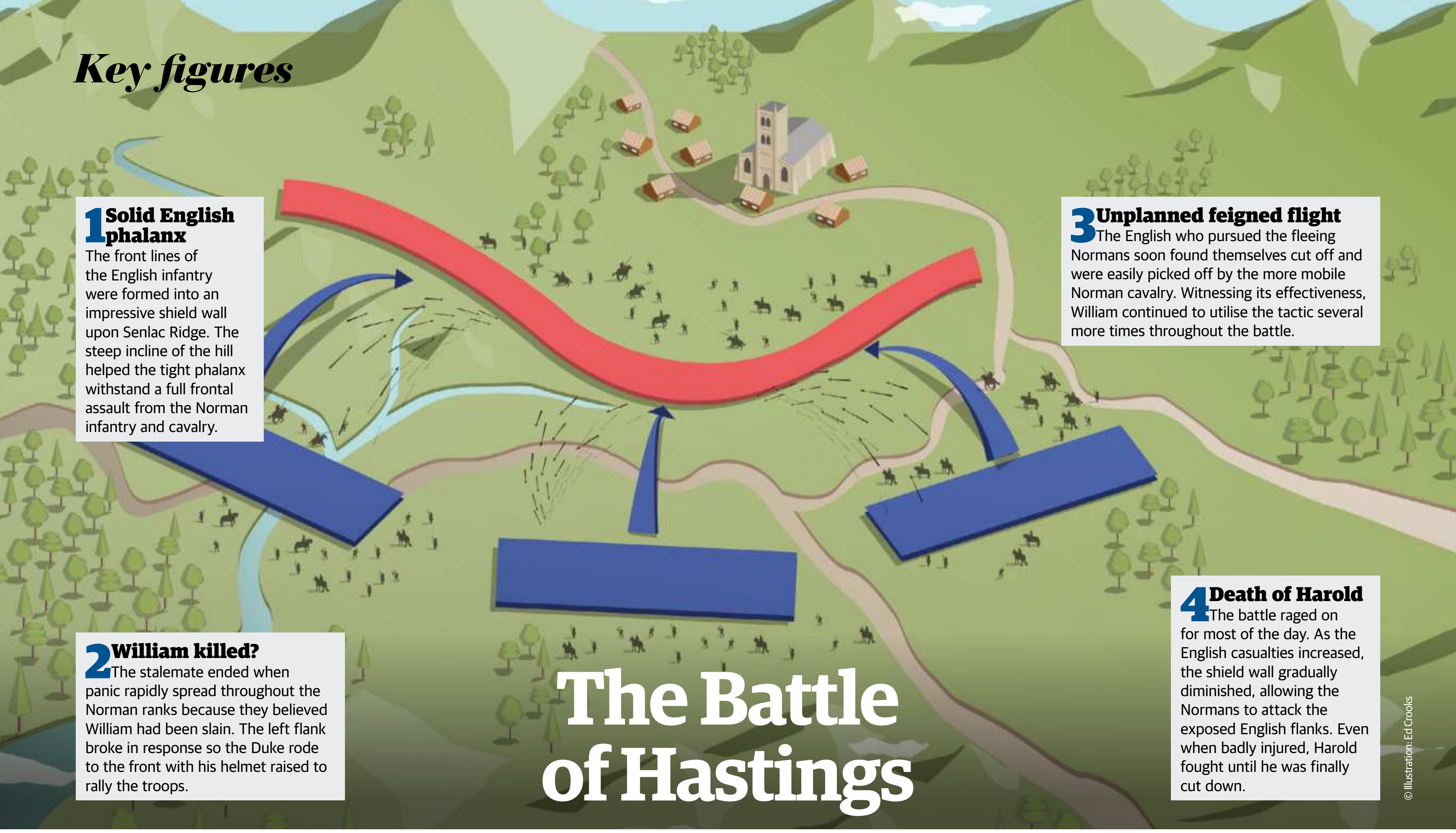
At the age of seven, William endured another traumatic experience when his father died while on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1035. Luckily for William, Robert cleverly took the precaution to have his nobles accept his son as the ducal heir to Normandy before he left on his journey. Yet the latest duke was still deprived of his parents for the most part, with little contact with his mother, which would have left a major impression upon his childhood. Robert also appointed several close relatives, trusted advisors and loyal companions to take care of William and run the kingdom in his absence. These men, such as William's great uncle Robert, the Archbishop of Rouen, fulfilled their roles and when it became



> “Harold had stolen what did not belong to him, so as the rightful heir, the duke would do whatever it took to claim what was his”

© Illustration: Joe Cummings

Key figures



1 Solid English phalanx
The front lines of the English infantry were formed into an impressive shield wall upon Senlac Ridge. The steep incline of the hill helped the tight phalanx withstand a full frontal assault from the Norman infantry and cavalry.

2 William killed?
The stalemate ended when panic rapidly spread throughout the Norman ranks because they believed William had been slain. The left flank broke in response so the Duke rode to the front with his helmet raised to rally the troops.

3 Unplanned feigned flight
The English who pursued the fleeing Normans soon found themselves cut off and were easily picked off by the more mobile Norman cavalry. Witnessing its effectiveness, William continued to utilise the tactic several more times throughout the battle.

4 Death of Harold
The battle raged on for most of the day. As the English casualties increased, the shield wall gradually diminished, allowing the Normans to attack the exposed English flanks. Even when badly injured, Harold fought until he was finally cut down.

The Battle of Hastings

© Illustration: Ed Crooks

clear that Duke Robert was never going to return, they continued to do so until William came of age.

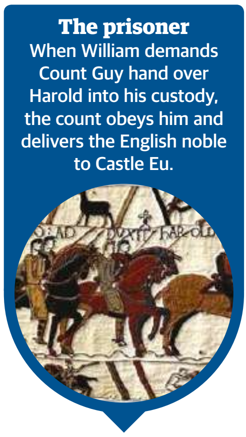
Yet it was surprising that Duke William survived his adolescence. Archbishop Robert managed to effectively rule the dukedom until his death in 1037. Afterward, Normandy devolved into anarchy as the aristocracy exploited the minority of the duke to carry out blood feuds with rival families, increase their lands or even plot to remove William to claim the duchy as their own. Many of the latter group were members of the duke's own family, known as Richardides for their descent from the Norman Duke Richard I. Because of this ancestry, several of the Richardides believed their claim to the ducal throne was much greater than that of 'William the Bastard'.

As William matured, he was surrounded by violence as several of his guardians were murdered. In late-May 1042, the duke slept in the castle of Vaudreuil. To protect the duke, William's steward, Osbern, lay beside him. Neither of them woke as an assassin crept into the room and stood over their bed. William woke to find the throat of his guardian slit open. As the young duke grew accustomed to the deaths of those closest to him, he himself managed to survive unharmed.

In 1046 and 1047, William faced the greatest threat to his life yet as the Richardides carried out a full-blown rebellion. However, the young duke acted quickly and effectively. William not only gathered his loyal vassals, but also reached out to his lord, King Henry I of France, and appealed for his help. Before long, William and Henry gathered a large enough force to confront the rebel army. At the Battle of Val-ès-Dunes in 1047, the King of France crushed the Norman dissidents, but William would continue to suppress minor revolts for the next three years.

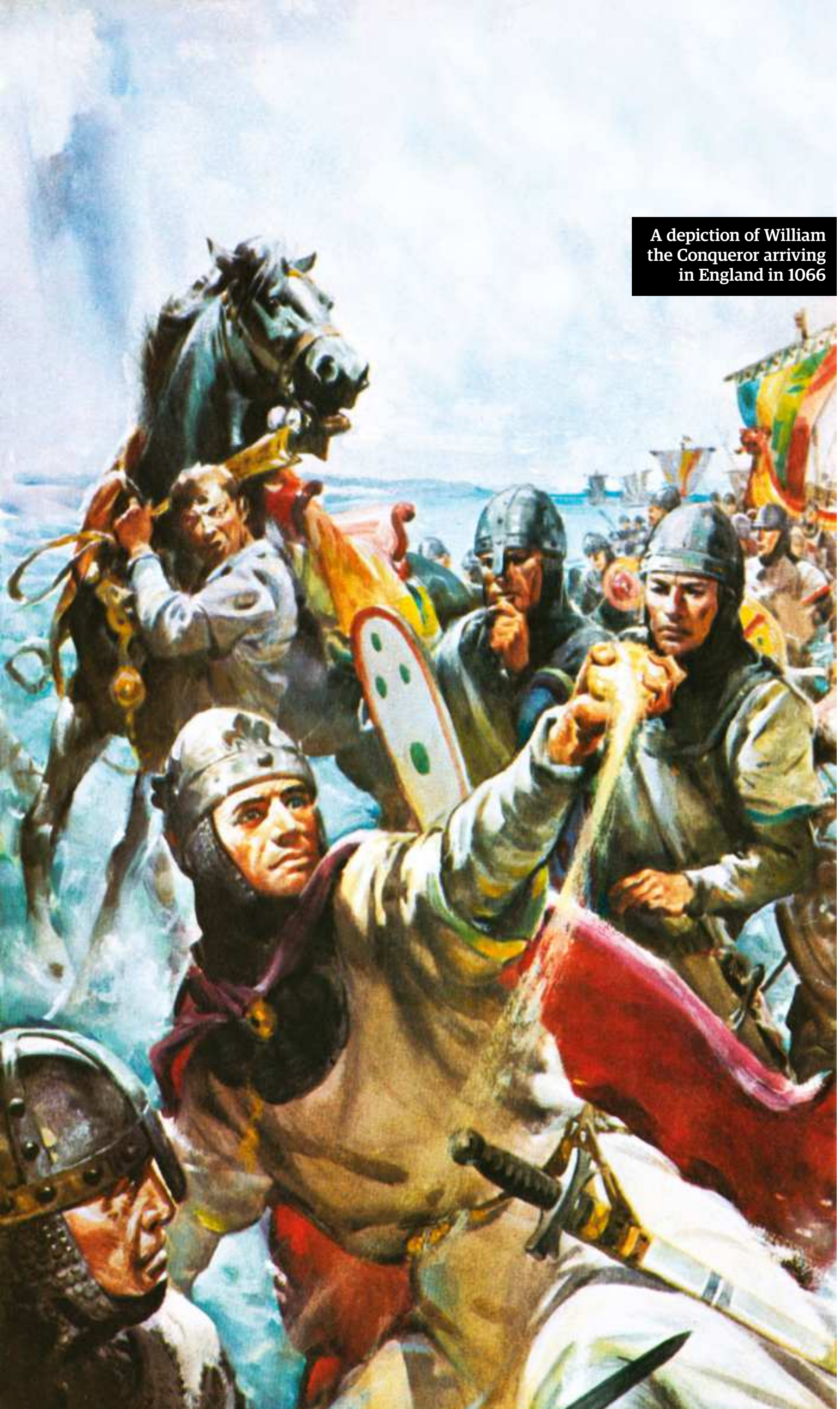
By the early-1050s, William was in his twenties and had not required the supervision of a regent for some time. Free to act with full ducal authority, William quelled rebellions throughout Normandy and then began to look outward. This brought him into conflict not only with the formidable count of Anjou, Geoffrey II Martel, but also with King Henry, who began to fear the growing power of the young duke. Throughout the violent clashes William participated in at home and abroad, the duke quickly began to build a reputation as a fierce warrior capable of leading rapid assaults and laying effective sieges. In addition, tales of the brutality inflicted on those who crossed him spread terror among his enemies.

The prisoner
When William demands Count Guy hand over Harold into his custody, the count obeys him and delivers the English noble to Castle Eu.



One of the most horrific instances of William's vengeance took place at Alençon in 1052. After his failed surprise assault on the town, the defenders on the wall yelled down insults about his illegitimate birth and beat animal skins with sticks to mock the fact his grandfather was a tanner. Once he managed to break into the town, William captured 36 of the men and punished them by ordering for all of their feet and hands to be severed. For the rest of his reign, William continued to order similar mutilations carried out on his worst enemies, however, his favoured punishment was imprisonment for several years; many times even for life.

Although nothing can excuse the terrible actions of the duke, his bravery in war and deep devotion to his close friends and family allowed him to attract numerous loyal followers. When his younger half-brothers, the sons of his mother, reached the proper age, William gave them land and prestigious titles. Odo became the bishop of Bayeux, while Robert was made the count of Mortain. Both men became staunch supporters of William and, together with other trustworthy lieutenants like Roger II of Montgomery and William FitzOsbern, they formed a tight-knit group around the duke who helped him greatly to achieve his goals. Yet the most important relationship of the duke was with his wife Matilda, daughter of Count Baldwin V of Flanders. At first, the union was a mere strategic



A depiction of William the Conqueror arriving in England in 1066

Contenders for the throne

Harold Godwinson
Earl of Wessex

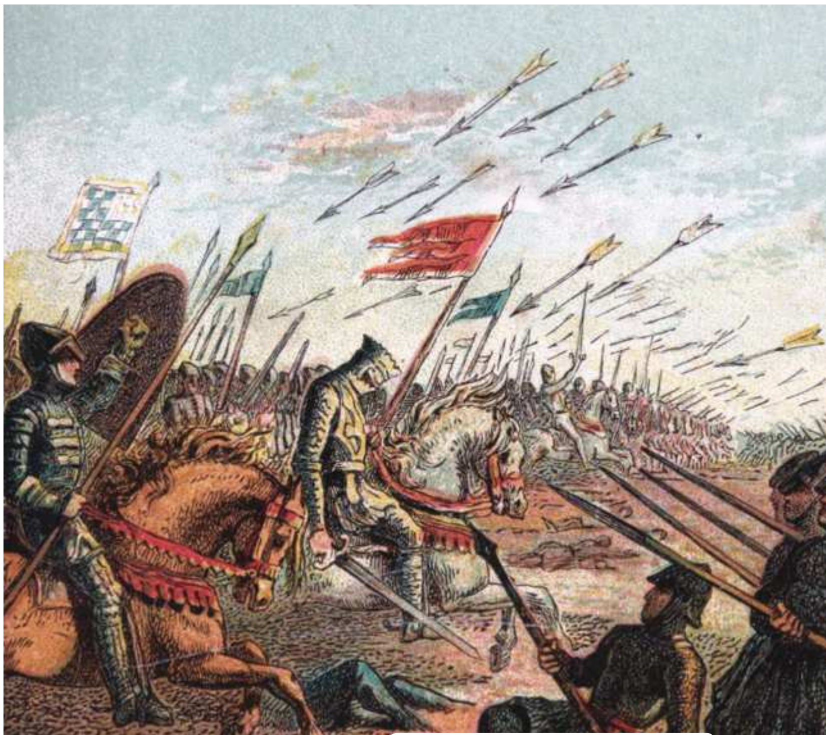
Harold was a powerful English magnate. He was present while Edward lay on his deathbed and bequeathed his throne to Harold. The Witan of Anglo-Saxon nobles accepted his coronation.

William
Duke of Normandy

Before Edward the Confessor became king in 1042, he lived in exile at the court of the dukes of Normandy. To show his appreciation, he supposedly promised to leave the throne to William.

Harald Hardrada
King of Norway

The Norwegian king had the weakest claim and was merely attempting to exploit a great opportunity to further his wealth and prestige through the conquest of prosperous England.



The Battle of Hastings proved pivotal for William the Conqueror

Brothers in arms

William leaves Normandy to carry out a campaign against Duke Conan II of Brittany and forces Harold to accompany him.

The oath

Back in Normandy, Harold swears an oath to uphold William's claim to the English throne over holy relics in Bayeux, most likely under duress.

Six ways William changed Europe

1 The conquest of England strengthened the bond between the British Isles and the mainland considerably, especially in religious institutions.

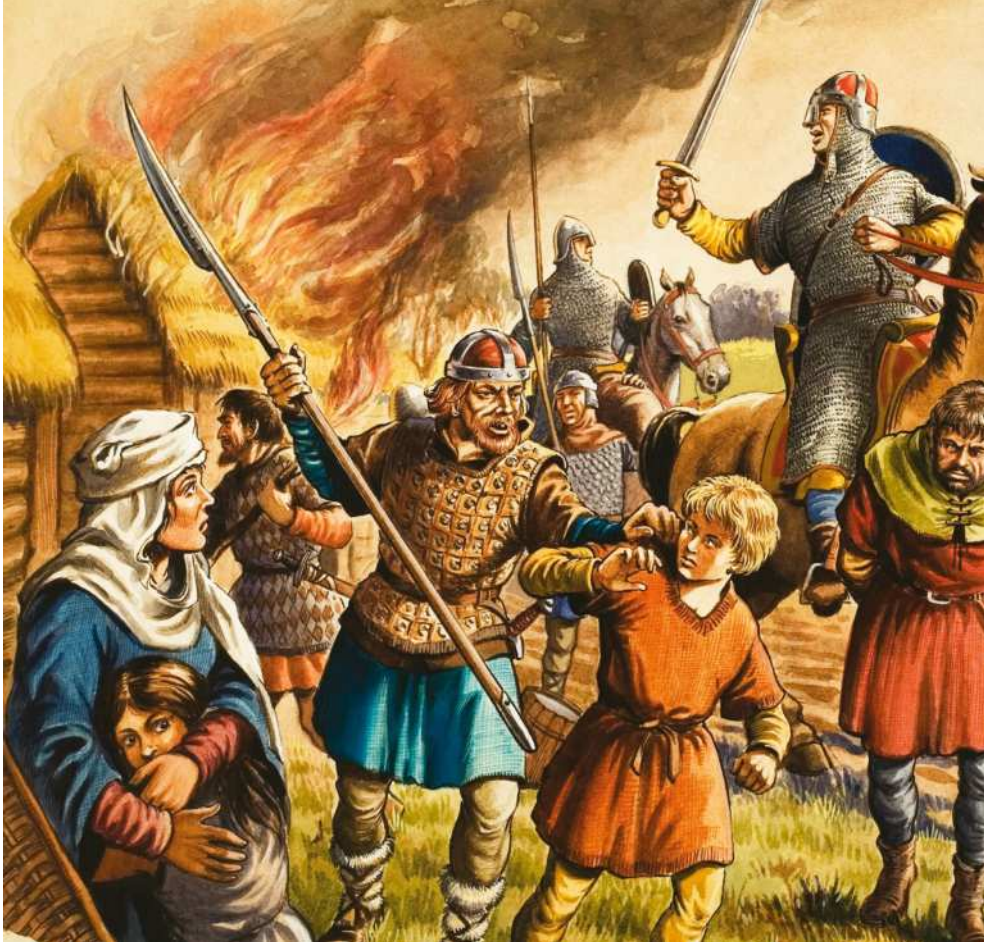
2 The effectiveness of knights at the Battle of Hastings and the domination by Norman armies led to an increased use of cavalry in England.

3 William introduced the English to the advanced continental castles by constructing many of his own to help his army occupy the country.

4 William's gradual but effective purge of nearly all Anglo-Saxon secular and lay magnates led to an almost entirely Norman aristocracy in England.

5 The Norman process of rebuilding the religious structures of England created a unique Anglo-Norman style for most local churches.

6 In one of his many tense conflicts with the papacy, William successfully defended the rights of Norman dukes to select their own bishops.



alliance with one of the most powerful magnates of northern France. However, over time the couple fell deeply in love. William remained completely devoted to her for the rest of his life and even trusted her with some of the most important positions in his lands.

The increasing power of Duke William led to the joint invasion of Normandy by his two major rivals, Count Geoffrey and King Henry, in 1053. Divided in two, the invasion forces failed utterly as one army was defeated at Mortemer and the other retreated in response. The rivals made another attempt in 1057, but William crushed the allied army at the Battle of Varaville. Within a few years the campaigns ceased, for both Henry and Geoffrey died. With his main adversaries gone and stability finally reached within his duchy, William was no longer forced to defend his lands and was free to go on the offensive.

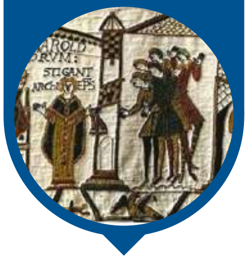
Shortly after the death of Count Herbert II of Maine on 9 March 1062, William led his first major conquest over the deceased magnate's territory. The duke claimed that Herbert had named him as his heir to the county so from that justification, William claimed the land of a vassal of his enemy, the count of Anjou, by 1064. Two years later, the duke made similar statements to justify the conquest of a much greater prize than the county of Maine.

In either 1064 or 1065, Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex, crossed the English Channel and accidentally landed in the territory of Count Guy of Ponthieu. Guy ordered his men to capture the wealthy Anglo-Saxon noble and imprisoned him, along with his retinue, in the castle of Beaurain. Once word reached William of Harold's condition, the duke immediately seized the opportunity. William forced his vassal, Guy, to release Harold and bring the English earl to him. Once in his custody, William did all he could to manipulate Harold into helping him attain his most ambitious prize, the throne of England.

As a child, the king of England, Edward the Confessor, was forced to flee his country and live as an exile in the Norman court of his uncle, Duke Richard II. Danish King Cnut invaded England in 1016 and eventually claimed the English crown, removing Edward's family from the succession. Then in 1042, Edward was allowed to return home and regain his birthright, the throne of England. A major reason for the king's return was the support given to him by the powerful Godwin family of Wessex. In gratitude, the new king bestowed lands and titles upon Harold and his brother; this alliance was then strengthened considerably in January 1045, when Edward married Harold's sister Edith, thus making the two men brothers-in-law. Since Edward had family connections and owed huge debts to both William and Harold, both men believed they should be the primary heirs of the old king who had no heir.

Harold is crowned

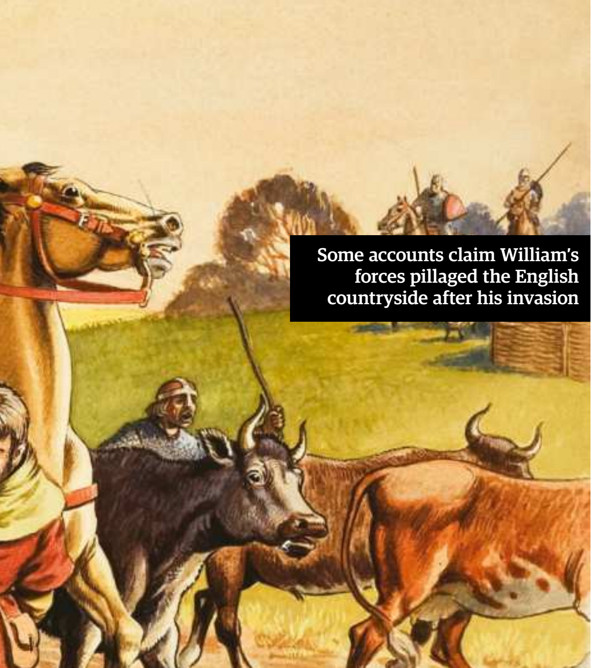
On 6 January 1066, Harold ascends to the throne of England after the funeral ceremony of the deceased King Edward the Confessor.



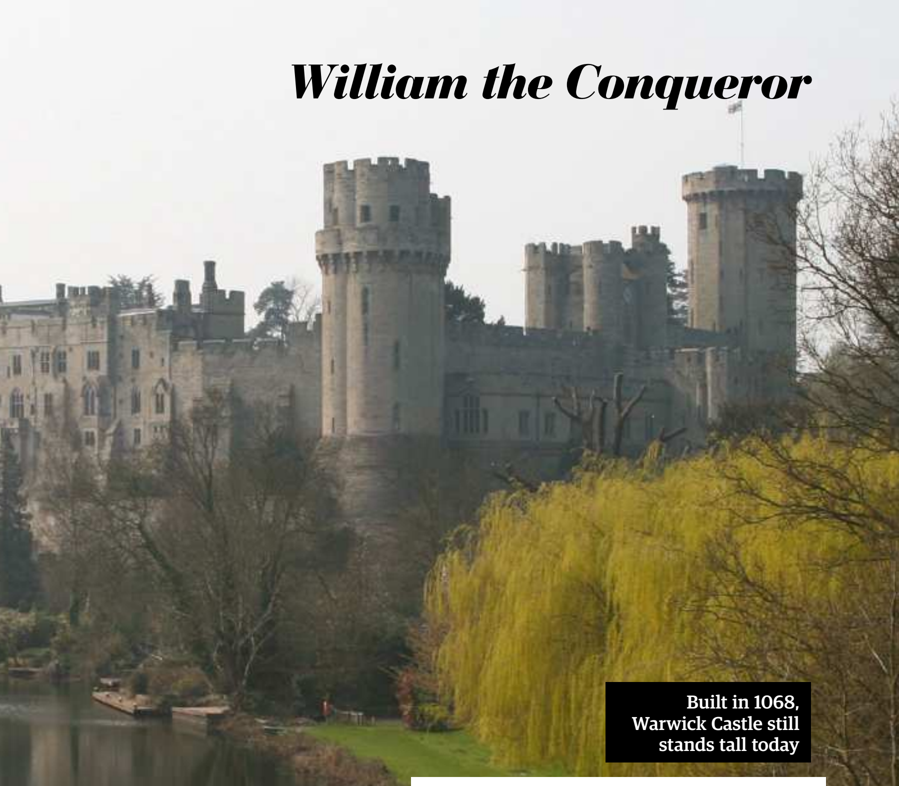
With Harold held hostage, William attempted to use a combination of flattery and threats to get the English magnate to not only accept his claim, but also help him attain the English throne upon the death of the ageing Edward. Therefore, Harold accompanied William on his invasion of Brittany in 1064, and when they returned to Normandy, Harold swore an oath of fealty to William. Certain he had achieved his goal, William let the Earl of Wessex return to his island.

Upon Edward's death, it became clear that Harold made his oath to William under duress and thus considered it completely invalid. He also quickly cemented his claim to the throne with the support of several witnesses to Edward naming Harold as his heir, along with earning the election of the Witan, a council of English nobles. The English may have accepted King Harold II, but William did not. William was certain that he had promised the throne to him; he would not forget that fact, nor would he let the English.

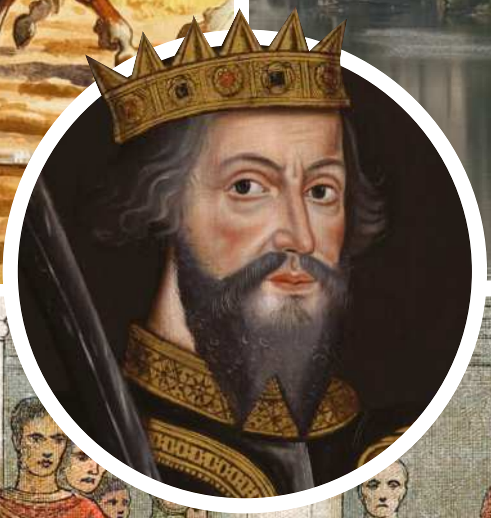
The situation looked bleak for Harold later in 1066. While William gathered a large invasion force and enormous fleet of 700 ships, King Harald Hardrada of Norway decided to exploit the vulnerability of England and invade as well. However, Harold and his Anglo-Saxon army managed to crush the Norwegians on 25 September at the

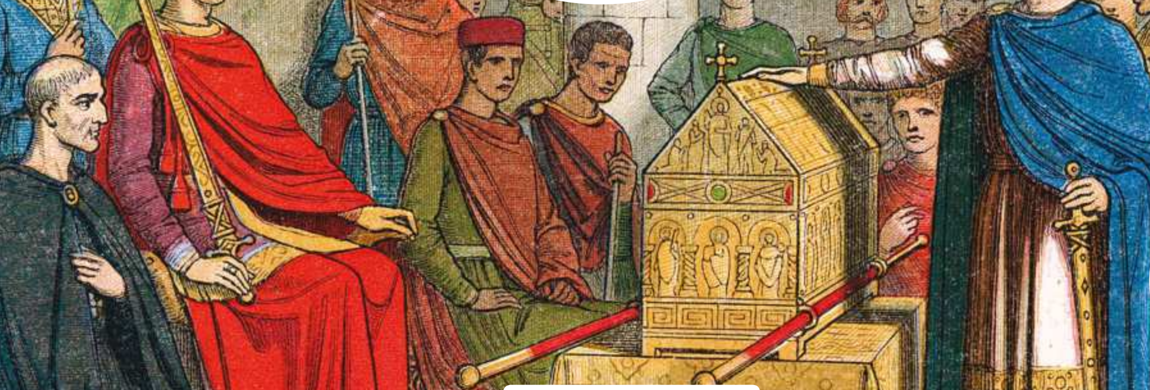


Some accounts claim William's forces pillaged the English countryside after his invasion



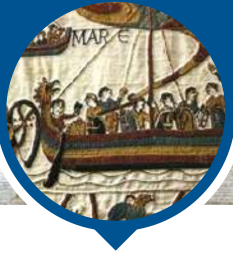
Built in 1068, Warwick Castle still stands tall today





An artwork depicting Harold II swearing fidelity to William of Normandy

The crossing
William leads his army to the coast where the soldiers embark on 700 ships to cross the Channel.



French continental rivals

Henry I
King of France

After helping William keep control over his duchy at the Battle of Val-ès-Dunes in 1047, Henry soon became threatened by the new duke's growing power. The king led two unsuccessful invasions of Normandy in 1053-4 and 1057 to try and subdue his rival.

Fulk IV le Réchin
Count of Anjou

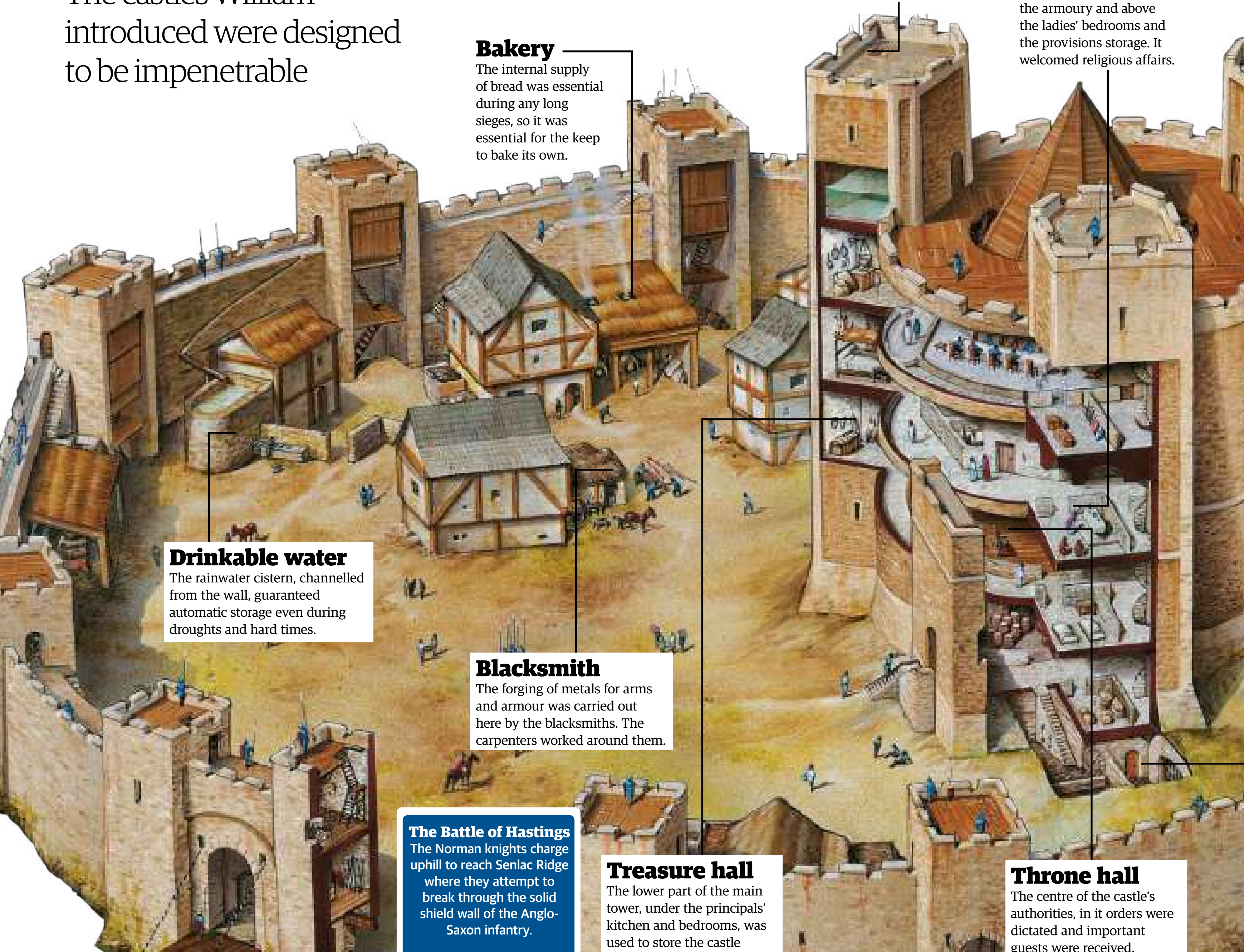
Once he seized the county from his brother, Geoffrey III, in 1068, Count Fulk of Anjou secured an alliance with King Philip against William. Beginning in the early-1070s, he attempted to reclaim Maine on several occasions, but failed.

Philip I
King of France

Threatened by his vassal as king of England, Philip made alliances with Anjou and Flanders to counter the strength of Normandy. Philip's insult infuriated William so much that his enthusiasm to seek vengeance at Mantes led to his death.

Inside a Norman Castle

The castles William introduced were designed to be impenetrable



Main tower
The castle's main tower is the last strong haven in its defence. A potent symbol of power, taking custody of it was very important.

Chapel
Was usually located under the armoury and above the ladies' bedrooms and the provisions storage. It welcomed religious affairs.

Bakery
The internal supply of bread was essential during any long sieges, so it was essential for the keep to bake its own.

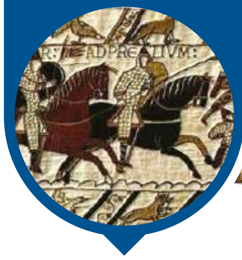
Drinkable water
The rainwater cistern, channelled from the wall, guaranteed automatic storage even during droughts and hard times.

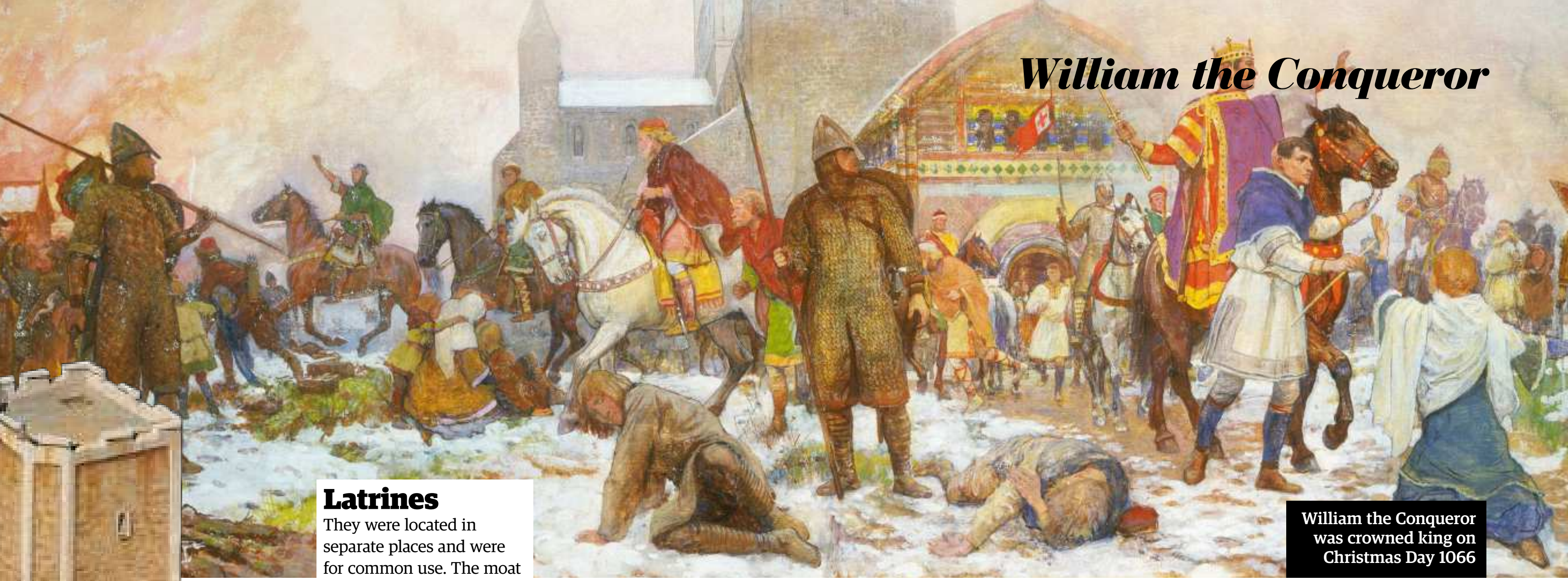
Blacksmith
The forging of metals for arms and armour was carried out here by the blacksmiths. The carpenters worked around them.

Treasure hall
The lower part of the main tower, under the principals' kitchen and bedrooms, was used to store the castle owner's wealth.

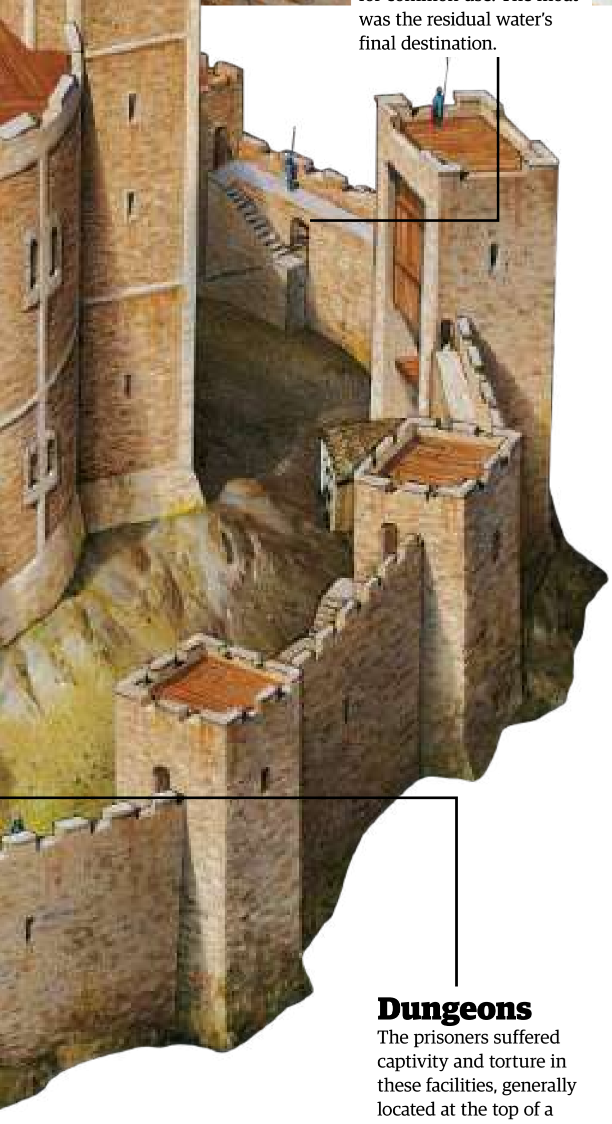
Throne hall
The centre of the castle's authorities, in it orders were dictated and important guests were received.

The Battle of Hastings
The Norman knights charge uphill to reach Senlac Ridge where they attempt to break through the solid shield wall of the Anglo-Saxon infantry.





William the Conqueror was crowned king on Christmas Day 1066



Latrines
They were located in separate places and were for common use. The moat was the residual water's final destination.

Dungeons
The prisoners suffered captivity and torture in these facilities, generally located at the top of a tower or below ground.

Battle of Stamford Bridge. They were then forced to travel the hundreds of miles south to confront the Normans. Although William faced a few setbacks, he landed in England shortly after on 28 September fully confident and immediately began to order his men to construct castles at Pevensey and Hastings to secure his new realm as he advanced to meet Harold.

Fought on 14 October 1066, the bloody and brutal Battle of Hastings lasted throughout the entire day and only ended once Harold was slain. The English gradually submitted during the following weeks and by the end of the year, William had his coronation in London. Although resistance to the foreign regime persisted for several years, the English never again formed a united front. To quell the revolts, William initiated a process of extreme fortification building and slowly removed the English from positions of power to be replaced by Norman men of his choice, like his trusted friends Roger II of Montgomery and William FitzOsbern.

When those methods did not work to subdue the north, the new king was once again forced to use his last resort; horrific violence. In 1070, King William reached his breaking point trying to put down rebellions in the region, so he decided to turn it into a wasteland. Many people were slaughtered, churches were ransacked, crops were destroyed and livestock killed. In the end, those that survived succumbed to starvation, leaving very little population left to ably revolt.

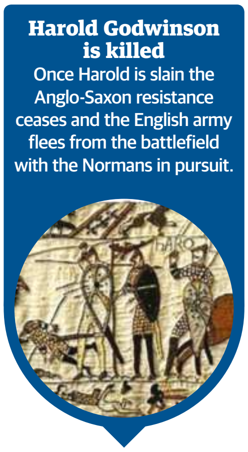
For the last two decades of his life, William's days as a conqueror were over. With the Scots supporting the remaining English rebels, the re-emergence of Anjou and the kingdom of France, as well as the continual threats of Danish invasions of England, enemies surrounded William, but he always managed to keep hold of his territory. Even when his son Robert Curthose rebelled against him in 1078, William effectively handled the revolt just as he had throughout his entire reign, although he was deeply hurt by the break with his heir. To make matters worse, he caught his brother Odo in an attempt to take his much-needed warriors to try to make himself pope. Then, the heartbreak for William reached its apex in 1083 when his beloved wife Matilda passed away on 2 November.

William was never able to fully amend the relationship with his son while alive, but he did accomplish one last great achievement when he commissioned the creation of the Domesday Book in 1085. In order to know exactly how much wealth his new realm contained, William had the most comprehensive survey of any preindustrial civilisation in the world created, giving a priceless, incredibly in-depth view of 11th-century England. Shortly after this grand act, William attempted to once again prove his martial prowess through the conquest of the Vexin. Old age had taken its toll, leading King Philip I to insult William with a remark equating him to a pregnant woman because of his increasing corpulence. Sent into his typical rage, William stormed Mantes in retaliation. But as his men burned the town, William's enthusiasm led his horse to rear up and slam the pommel of his saddle into his stomach.

On 9 September, King William succumbed to the intense internal bleeding caused by the injury. In one final act of reconciliation, his son Robert was still allowed to succeed him as Duke of Normandy. However, the conquests he fought so hard to attain were divided as the Kingdom of England went to his younger son, William Rufus. Therefore, the short-lived Empire of Normandy died with the formidable ruler who created it.

Harold Godwinson is killed

Once Harold is slain the Anglo-Saxon resistance ceases and the English army flees from the battlefield with the Normans in pursuit.



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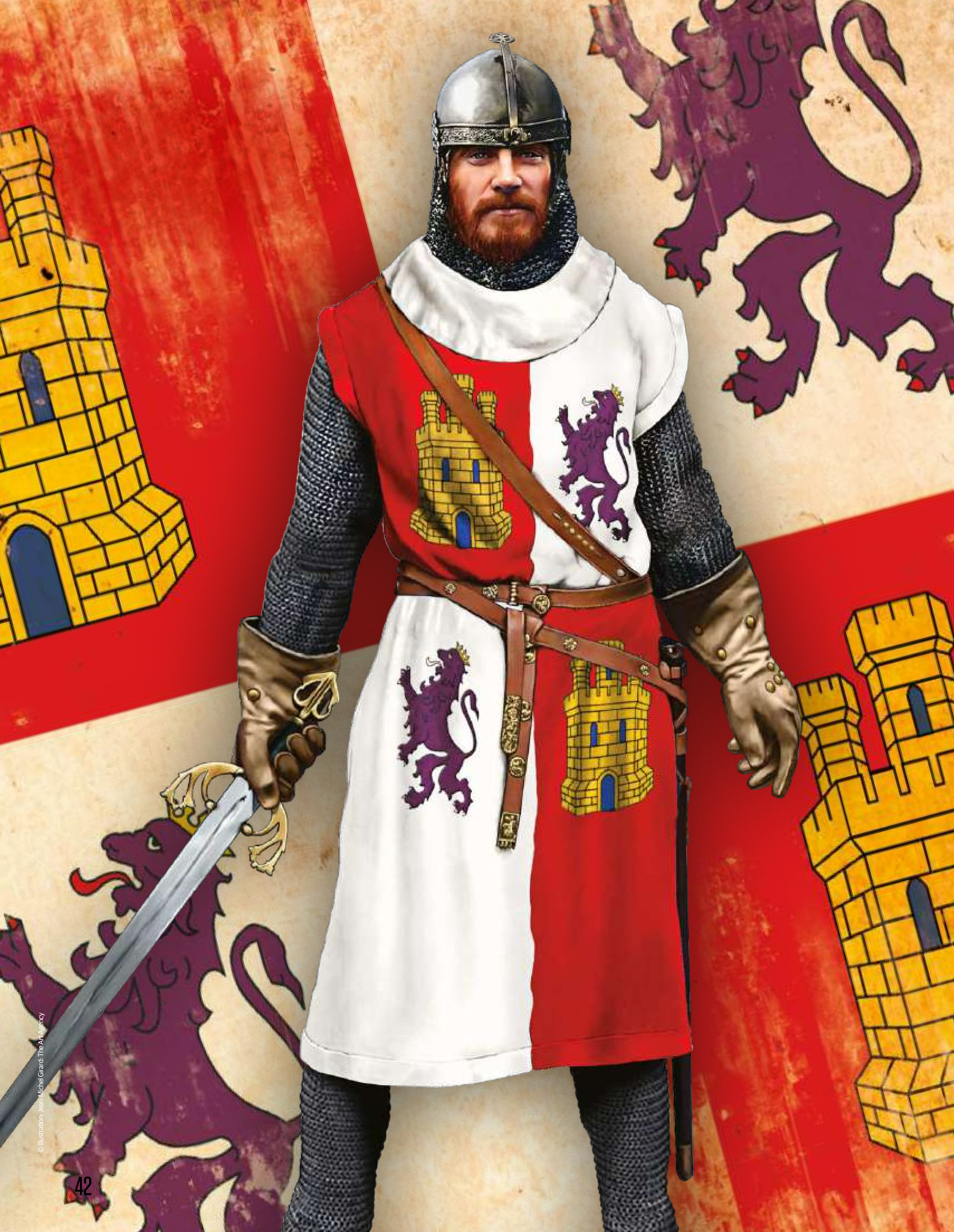

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El Cid

Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar is an icon of Spanish history, but was he a committed warrior or an unscrupulous mercenary?

In October 1094, the city of Valencia stood on the brink of falling to yet another conquest. Besieged by tens of thousands of invaders, the city's aging lord and his small force of knights were trapped within their own walls, awaiting almost certain defeat. Valencia's master had been a warrior for more than 30 years, but by now must have realised he was facing his greatest test. Gathering his men into order, he betrayed no fear as he gave his orders: they would ride out and meet the enemy head on. In a cry that would echo down the centuries, he drew his sword and proclaimed to his fellow knights: "For God and Saint James and at them!" He then charged through the gates and into legend.

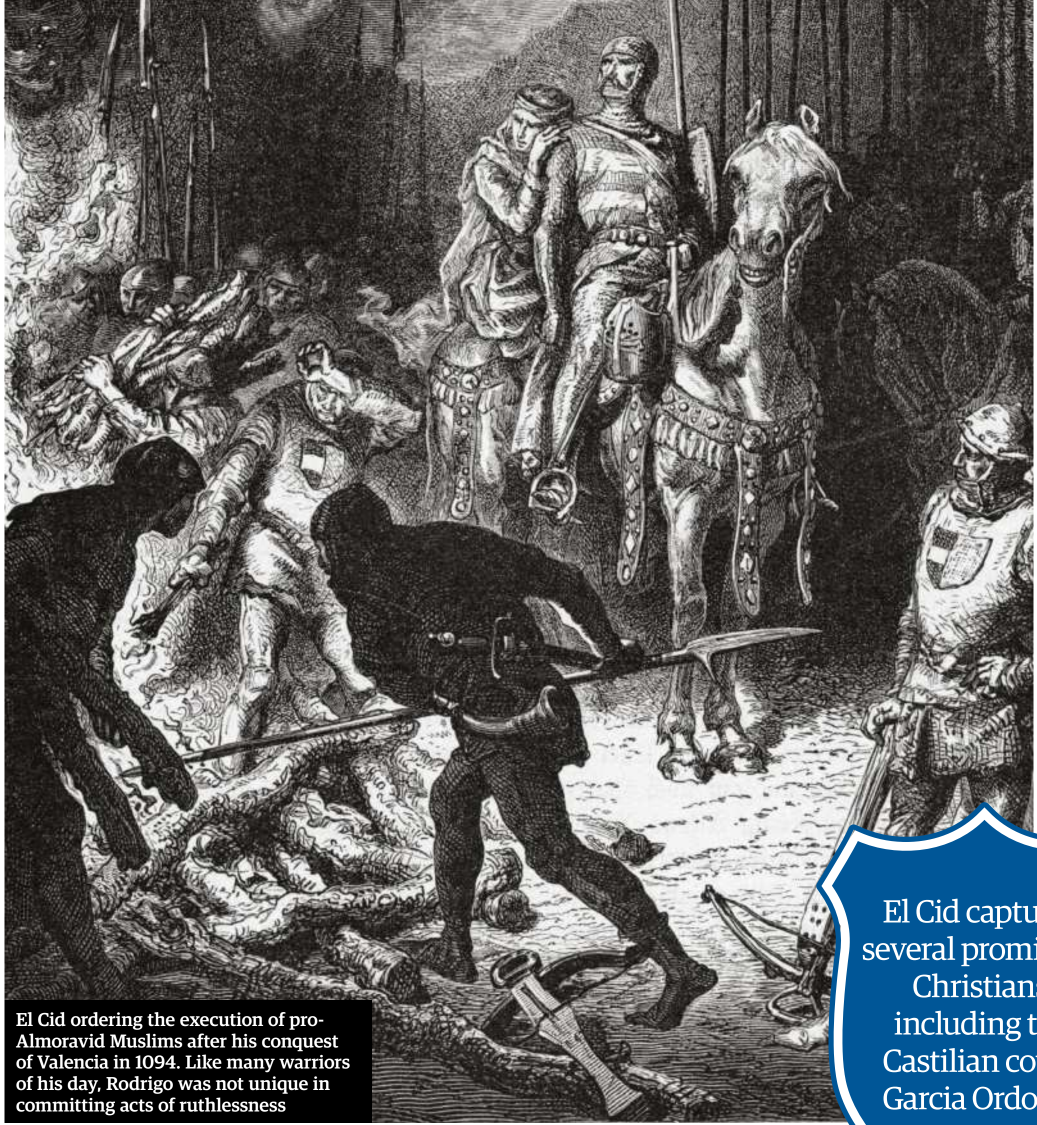
The man in question was Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, a Christian knight who was known to his countrymen as 'El Campeador' ('Outstanding Warrior') and to his Muslim enemies as 'El Cid' ('The Lord'). The legend of El Cid has since become central to Spain's national story: the tale of the noble warrior who sought to free his Iberian homeland from the occupation of the Muslim Moors – or so popular culture and literature would have us believe. Rodrigo was indeed a highly talented soldier who inflicted many defeats on the Moors, but he did not do so out of any particular sense of religious fervour or patriotic dreams of a Christian Spain. In reality, El Cid was an ambitious mercenary who was primarily interested in wealth, territory and personal glory. Above all, Rodrigo had no qualms fighting for Muslim leaders against his fellow Christians, which is in direct contrast to the core of his legend. Once all the gloss is stripped away from El Cid, what remains is a fascinating insight into the power politics of 11th-century Spain, where the conflict between Christians and Muslims contained many shades of grey.

Since the 8th century, Muslim rulers had controlled as much as two-thirds of the Iberian Peninsula, at a time when the relatively new religion of Islam was expanding into large portions of the known world. Iberia was the Islamic gateway into Europe from North Africa and a powerful caliphate governed Moorish Spain (then called al-Andalus) until 1031, when it fell apart and split into weaker Arab mini-states called 'taifas'. The Moors had largely supplanted Christian kingdoms that were ruled by the descendents of Germanic tribes, such as the Visigoths, and since the Muslim conquests, Iberian Christianity had been largely confined to the north of the peninsula. However, with the collapse of al-Andalus, the Christians began to reassert themselves, pushing their way south and starting to force the taifas to pay tribute or hire Christian mercenaries for protection. However, there was little, if any, sense of nationhood or crusade among the resurgent kingdoms. It was into this confused atmosphere that El Cid was born.

Dividing the kingdom

Rodrigo was born around 1043 at Vivar as the son of a minor official in the kingdom of Castile-León. Ferdinand I ruled the land and Rodrigo entered his court as a member of the household of Sancho, Ferdinand's heir. It was in Ferdinand's service that Rodrigo first distinguished himself at the Battle of Graus, which is traditionally said to have taken place on 8 May 1063. The clash demonstrated the political complexities of the time and was the first occasion when Rodrigo had fought his fellow Christians. Ramiro I of Aragon had attacked the Muslim kingdom of Zaragoza, and despite the differences in religion, Ferdinand sent Sancho with 300 Castilian knights (including Rodrigo) to aid the Zaragozan ruler Ahmad al-Muqtadir, because he feared an Aragonese expansion. Ramiro was defeated and killed and Rodrigo was reputed to have made a name for himself by personally despatching a leading Aragonese knight in single combat.

Two years later, Ferdinand died and his kingdom was divided between his sons, with Sancho II receiving Castile and his younger brother Alfonso inheriting León. Rodrigo was made 'armiger'



El Cid ordering the execution of pro-Almoravid Muslims after his conquest of Valencia in 1094. Like many warriors of his day, Rodrigo was not unique in committing acts of ruthlessness

El Cid captured several prominent Christians, including the Castilian count Garcia Ordonez

(commander) of Sancho's military forces, with his duties including the training and commanding of Sancho's household troops, which were the elite knights of Castile. It was from this appointment that Rodrigo earned his Christian moniker of 'El Campeador'. In 1068, Sancho fought a war against Alfonso, and Rodrigo led his troops at the Battle of Llantada on 19 July 1068 and again at Golpejera on 10 January 1072. This latter fight forced Alfonso into exile, but Sancho was later assassinated in October 1072, and Alfonso then succeeded to the Castilian throne.

As Alfonso VI, the new king ruled over an expanded Christian kingdom that included Castile, León and Galicia and he rather surprisingly kept Rodrigo in service, even marrying him to his niece Jimena. Nonetheless, despite now being married to royalty, Rodrigo was demoted from armiger and then given routine administrative duties to perform. This was most likely as a punishment for his previous campaigns against Alfonso, and Rodrigo eventually fell out of favour in 1079.

That same year, Alfonso entrusted Rodrigo with collecting tributes from the neighbouring Moorish state of Seville. While he was there, he became involved in a war between Seville and its Muslim neighbour, Granada. The campaign culminated in a three-hour battle at Cabra, where the army of Seville and Rodrigo defeated the Granadans. El Cid captured several prominent Christians, including the Castilian count Garcia Ordonez. Rodrigo was now in serious trouble, as Ordonez was a powerful Castilian nobleman who was married to the sister of Sancho IV of Navarre, and his ransom by Rodrigo was a significant humiliation for the Spanish royal families. Rodrigo did not help matters by openly bragging about Ordonez's capture, and Alfonso became exasperated by El Cid's conduct against his fellow Castilians. Rodrigo was eventually exiled, and although he remained loyal to Alfonso, he travelled east with his military retinue to take up service with the Muslim rulers of Zaragoza.

Mercenary for the Moors

Rodrigo was now a full-time mercenary captain and remained in the service of Zaragoza for the next five years. Although his true allegiances and motives are difficult to establish, it is clear that he was a serious soldier whose tactics would now be seen as quite innovative for the time. During his campaigns, Rodrigo often ordered that military works by Roman and Greek authors be read aloud to him and his troops, both for entertainment and inspiration during battle. His armies also had a novel approach to planning strategy and El Cid held what would now be called 'brainstorming' sessions before each battle to discuss tactics. According to some sources, Rodrigo had a humble personality and frequently accepted suggestions from his troops. Although this seems unlikely behaviour from a veteran soldier, it is true that El Cid had a real talent for imaginative improvisation in warfare.

One of his first battles for Zaragoza was around the Siege of Alcocer in 1081, where he attacked the nearby settlement of Castejon at dawn when most of the inhabitants were out in the fields. In an interesting insight into 11th century siege warfare, Rodrigo unexpectedly burst through the gates and killed 15 men. With the district now in his hands, he took local cattle and clothes to distribute to his men and made a camp at Alcocer with a trench around it so that his small force couldn't be surprised. He then took Alcocer by a trick, which involved striking all of his tents but one. The town inhabitants came out in curiosity to examine the remaining tent but they had been lured into a trap, and Rodrigo's force came into view to charge through the open gates, killing around 300 of Zaragoza's Moorish enemies.

The following year, Rodrigo had led the Zaragozan army and defeated a combined force that included the Muslim kings of Valencia and Lleida, the king of Aragon and the count of Barcelona. However, his most glorious victory for Zaragoza came in 1084 at Morella. El Cid was fighting for Yusuf al-Mu'tamin, who was being invaded by Sancho Ramírez, the king of unified Aragon and Navarra. Sancho had moved quickly, taking Arquedas and Castella, but Rodrigo and al-Mu'tamin launched a five-day raid into Aragon and ravaged the territory around Morella.

Sancho joined forces with the Muslim ruler of Denia, Lleida and Tortosa and camped by the River Ebro before sending a demand to Rodrigo that he withdraw. El Cid reportedly replied with an uncompromising message and won an overwhelming victory. He vigorously pursued his Christian enemies and took 2,000 Aragonese and Navarrese prisoners, 16 of whom were very important nobles.

Morella was perhaps the antithesis of Rodrigo's posthumous reputation as the defender of Christian Spain and demonstrates that El Cid's allegiance was not to any particular cause but to whoever was the highest bidder. Nonetheless, a crisis soon emerged that would force Rodrigo into some sense of duty.

> "Rodrigo was now a full-time mercenary captain and remained in the service of Zaragoza for the next five years"

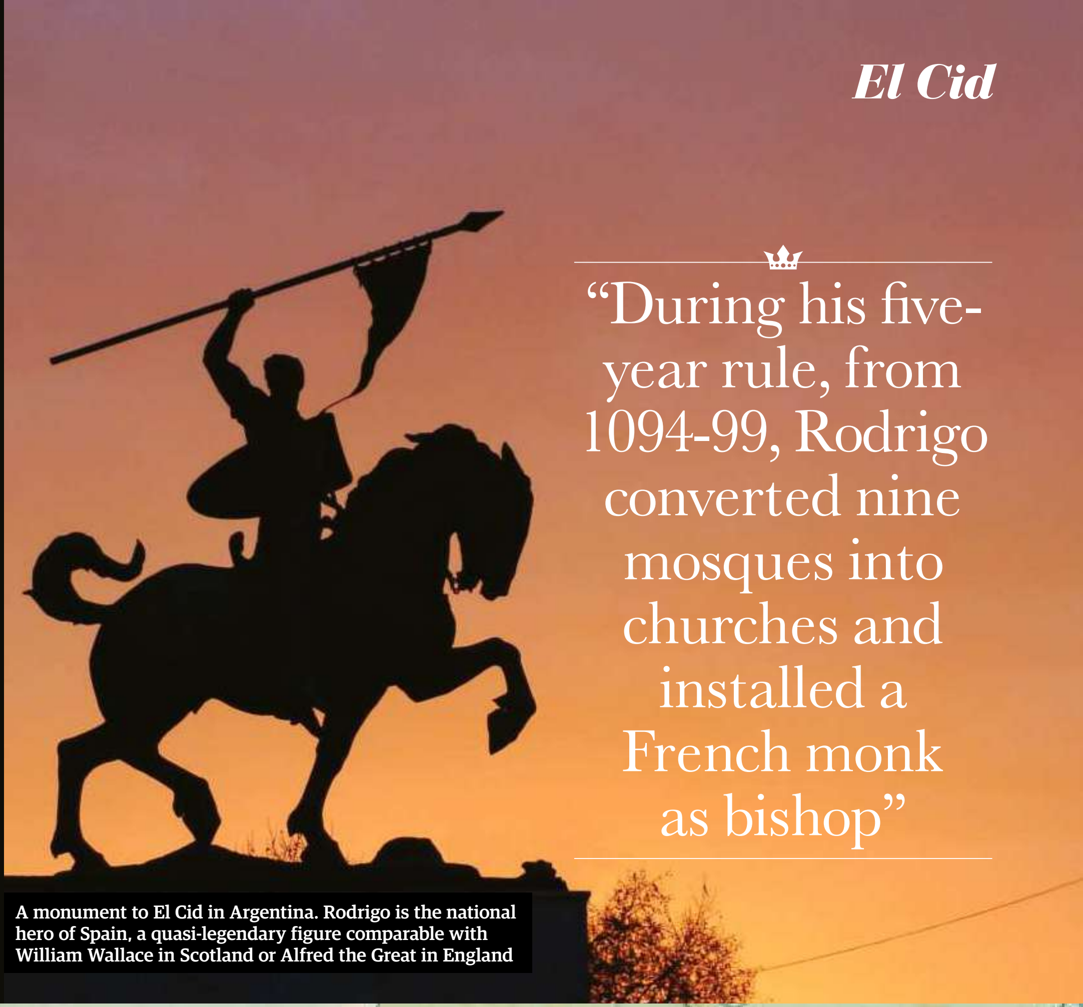
El Cid's Iberia

c.1094

In the 11th century, Spain and Portugal had not yet come into existence and the Iberian Peninsula comprised of a myriad of Christian and Muslim territories

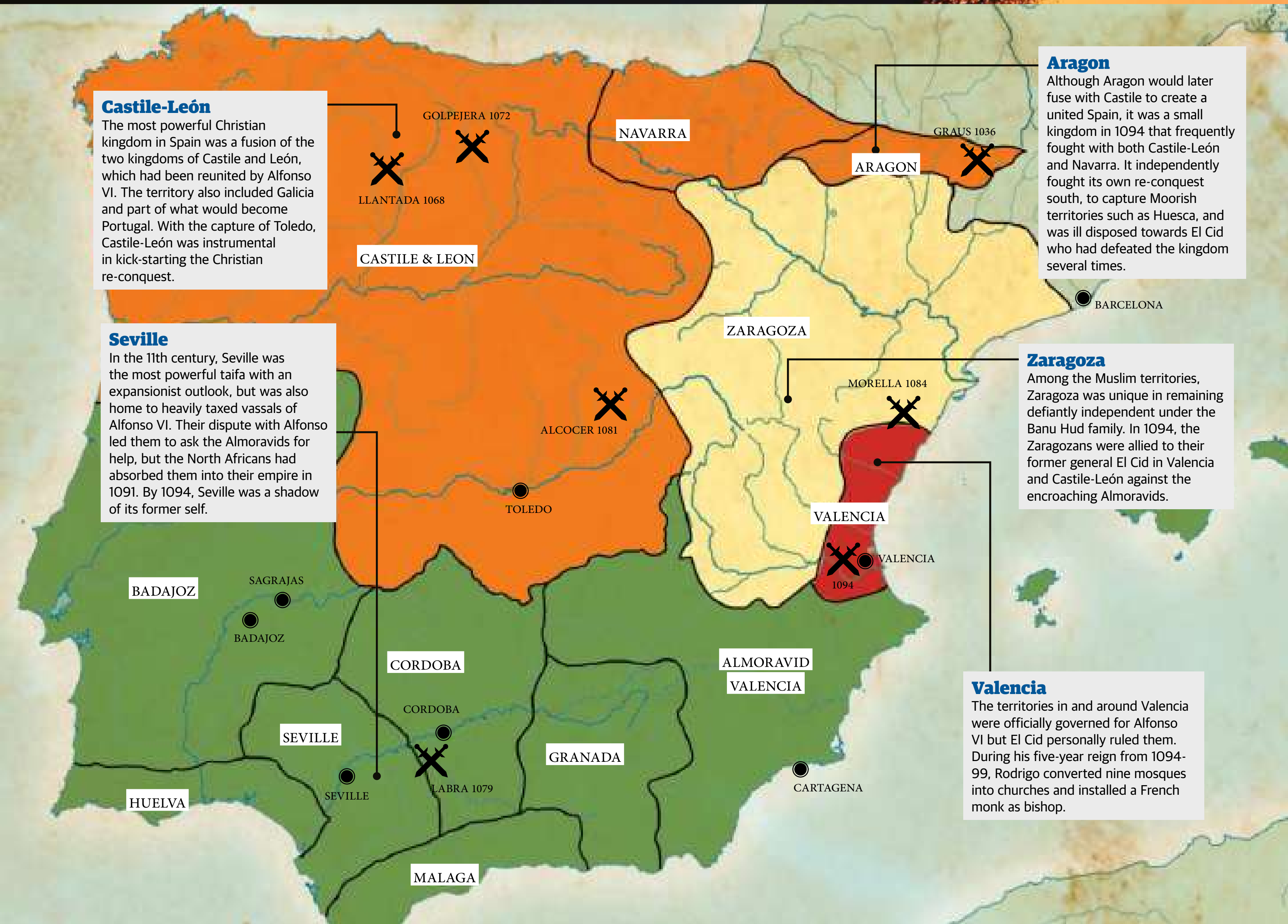
In 1094, Iberia was split between a Muslim south and a Christian north. Muslim mini-states known as 'taifas' mostly came under the umbrella of the powerful Almoravid dynasty, while the Christian kingdoms were fiercely independent and frequently fought each other. Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar's battles were mainly fought within Christian territories, with El Cid often clashing with his co-religionists, as well as the Moors. His unofficial fief of Valencia was ostensibly Castilian but was arguably a huge prize for a warrior.

⚔ BATTLE SITE & YEAR ○ MAJOR CITY
🟠 CHRISTIAN TERRITORY 🟢 MUSLIM TERRITORY
🟡 ZARAGOZAN TERRITORY 🔴 VALENCIAN TERRITORY



> "During his five-year rule, from 1094-99, Rodrigo converted nine mosques into churches and installed a French monk as bishop"

A monument to El Cid in Argentina. Rodrigo is the national hero of Spain, a quasi-legendary figure comparable with William Wallace in Scotland or Alfred the Great in England



Castile-León
The most powerful Christian kingdom in Spain was a fusion of the two kingdoms of Castile and León, which had been reunited by Alfonso VI. The territory also included Galicia and part of what would become Portugal. With the capture of Toledo, Castile-León was instrumental in kick-starting the Christian re-conquest.

Seville
In the 11th century, Seville was the most powerful taifa with an expansionist outlook, but was also home to heavily taxed vassals of Alfonso VI. Their dispute with Alfonso led them to ask the Almoravids for help, but the North Africans had absorbed them into their empire in 1091. By 1094, Seville was a shadow of its former self.

Aragon
Although Aragon would later fuse with Castile to create a united Spain, it was a small kingdom in 1094 that frequently fought with both Castile-León and Navarra. It independently fought its own re-conquest south, to capture Moorish territories such as Huesca, and was ill disposed towards El Cid who had defeated the kingdom several times.

Zaragoza
Among the Muslim territories, Zaragoza was unique in remaining defiantly independent under the Banu Hud family. In 1094, the Zaragozans were allied to their former general El Cid in Valencia and Castile-León against the encroaching Almoravids.

Valencia
The territories in and around Valencia were officially governed for Alfonso VI but El Cid personally ruled them. During his five-year reign from 1094-99, Rodrigo converted nine mosques into churches and installed a French monk as bishop.

The making of the legend

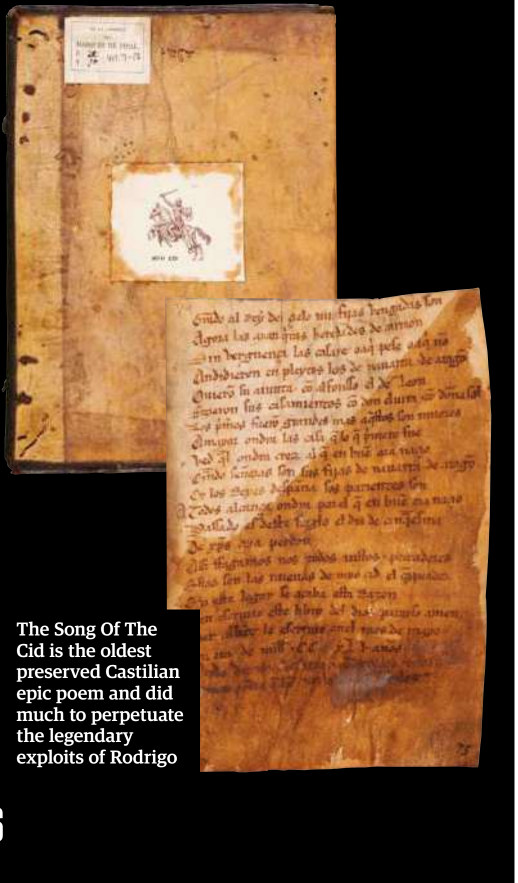
Despite his mercenary career and dubious loyalties, El Cid became known to history as a patriotic hero thanks to an untrustworthy source: popular culture

Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar's fame grew significantly in the centuries after his death, to the point where history became blurred with fiction. He was the glowing subject of an important long poem called Cantar De Mio Cid ('The Song Of The Cid') which was written between 1150 and 1207. It is the oldest preserved poem written in Castilian, which is the basis for the modern Spanish language. Tales of Rodrigo's exploits had already been circulating, but the poem, which was designed to be performed in public, distorted his character into a saintly figure. Every incident in the poem demonstrates his nobility at the expense of Alfonso VI, who is portrayed as lacking in character.

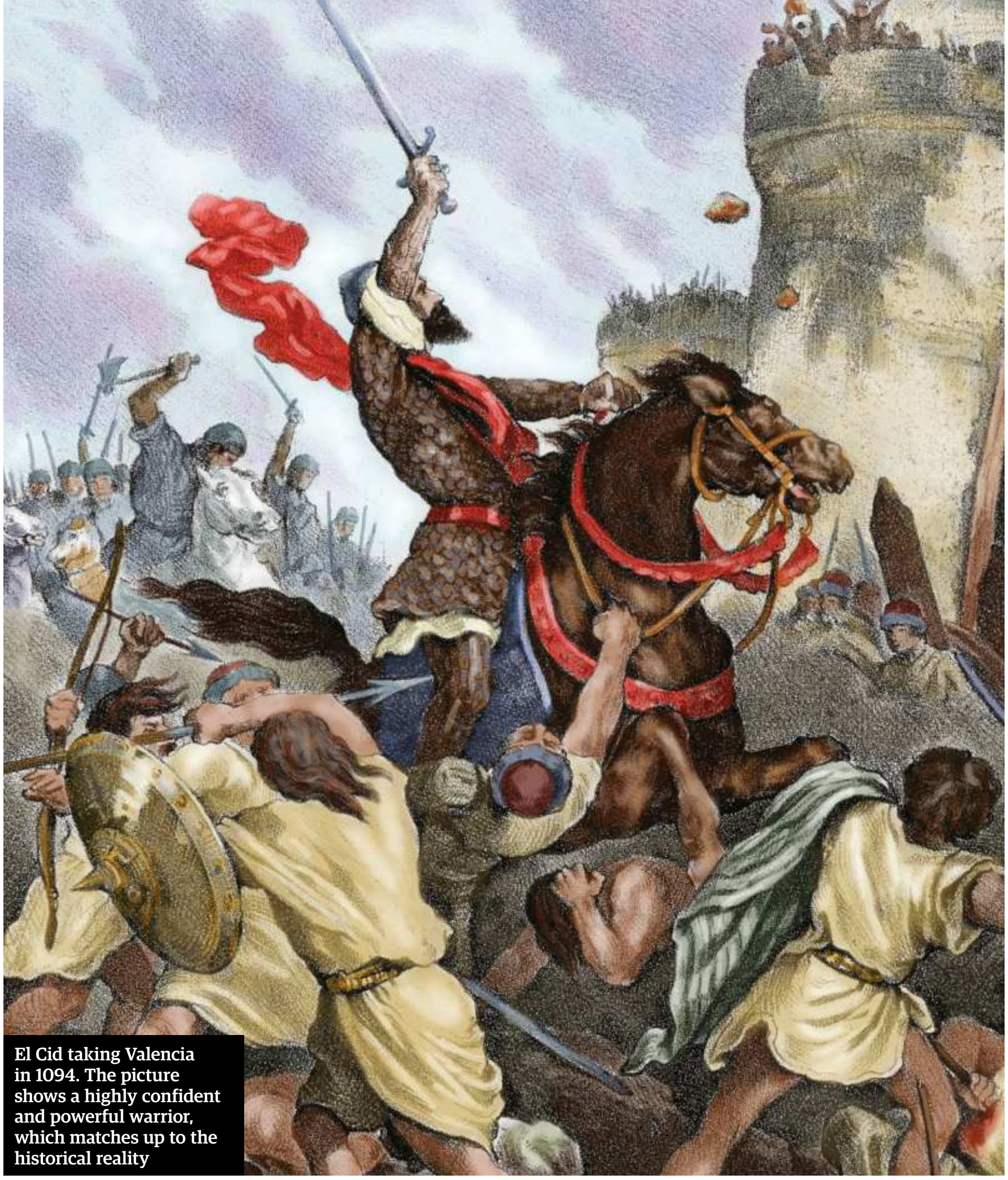
El Cid is frequently depicted as having a special relationship with the divine, such as when he is visited by the Angel Gabriel who tells him: "Ride, Cid, most noble Campeador, for never yet did knight/Ride forth upon an hour whose aspect was so bright. While thou shalt live good fortune shall be with thee and shine."

In a similar vein, Rodrigo is depicted as declaring his own might against his enemies: "For the love of the Creator, smite them, my gallants ah. I am Rodrigo Díaz of Vivar, the Cid, the Campeador."

Like many other works of literature that glorify national heroes, the poem created a fictional character based on a historical person that was very much at odds with reality. So popular was the fictional Rodrigo, that he caught the attention of Hollywood and his current heroic reputation owes much to the 1961 epic film El Cid starring Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren.



The Song Of The Cid is the oldest preserved Castilian epic poem and did much to perpetuate the legendary exploits of Rodrigo



El Cid taking Valencia in 1094. The picture shows a highly confident and powerful warrior, which matches up to the historical reality

The wrath of North Africa

It was Alfonso VI, not Rodrigo, who saw himself as a Christian leader against the Moors and he envisioned himself as the head of a re-conquest of Iberia. In 1077, he declared himself to be the 'Emperor of All Spain' and increased his tribute demands from the taifas. The Muslim rulers appealed for help from Emir Yusuf ibn Tashfin, of the Almoravid dynasty, the powerful Berber leader in Africa, and from this point on, tensions between Muslims and Christians in Spain intensified. Tashfin initially resisted the Moorish entreaties - he considered them to be irreligious and indolent - but in 1085, Alfonso conquered Toledo, which was the largest city in Muslim Spain and a focal point of Islamic scholarship.

The city was also important for the Christians, as it had been the Visigothic capital before the Muslim conquest, and Alfonso reclaimed its prominent status. This was the first concrete step taken by Castile-León in the re-conquest and the fanatically religious Tashfin felt compelled to act. A 'jihad' (religious war) was declared on Christian Spain in order to defend the Muslim faithful and to protect Islam's borders.

On 30 July 1086, Tashfin crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and landed with 4,000 Berber and African troops. By October, he had joined with Andalusian Muslims at Badajoz and met Alfonso's army at Sagrajas on 23 October. Alfonso had scraped together as little as 2,500 troops and was heavily defeated, with the king himself narrowly escaping with 500 knights. Tashfin beheaded the Christian dead, loaded them onto carts and took them to cities throughout al-Andalus to prove that there had been a Moorish victory.

Capture of Valencia

Despite this dramatic victory, Tashfin had to return to Morocco to suppress an uprising and his triumph was not followed through. Nevertheless, Sagrajas weakened Alfonso and the taifas allied themselves to Tashfin. In this crisis, Alfonso turned to Rodrigo for help and lifted his exile along with a generous settlement. In exchange for taking part in the new Reconquista strategy, Rodrigo kept the lands that he had seized from Muslim rule and within six years he established a protectorate over much of the eastern coast of Spain.

It was in the east of the country that Alfonso now set his sights, with Valencia becoming the main target. The city was an important cultural and commercial centre and Alfonso believed that its people would welcome a new ruler. Half of its population were Mozarabs - Christians who had adopted Arabic speech, dress and customs - while the other half were Muslims, split into factions who were either pro or anti-Tashfin.

Rodrigo was charged with taking the city, and after a long siege that lasted almost a year, he took Valencia in May 1094. It had not been an easy siege, as Rodrigo had ravaged the surrounding countryside for supplies, and once the town was taken, his men brutally sacked it. Having expelled the pro-Tashfin population, Rodrigo assumed the reigns of power and ruled in the name of Alfonso, although in reality Valencia became El Cid's own personal fiefdom.

Confronting the Almoravids

After Tashfin obtained a fatwa that legitimised his annexation of the taifas of al-Andalus, Valencia became the key to his strategy. If he could seize it from Rodrigo, he could then put pressure on Alfonso in Toledo as well as Zaragoza, which was stubbornly clinging on as the last independent taifa. In August 1094, a huge army of at least 25,000 men crossed the Gibraltar Strait with some galleys towing rafts, which carried elephants. Tashfin appointed his nephew, Abu Abdullah bin Muhammad, to lead the campaign into Spain, and the first objective was to take Valencia and eject El Cid and his 4,000 defenders.

Rodrigo would have had reason to fear Tashfin's force, as it consisted of the fearsome Almoravid warriors. These North African soldiers were from different tribes and ethnic groups, but they were disciplined professionals, united by their fanatical devotion to Islam. They were trained to attack in mixed teams, organised to move en masse and connected by a corps system of flags and drums. 80 per cent of the Almoravid army was mounted in light cavalry formations and, although they were poorly armoured, they developed some tactics to literally run rings around the heavily armoured Christian knights.

Almoravid cavalry was particularly noted for luring impulsive knights into the spears of the infantry and then defeating them with mounted archers who would bring down knights' horses before they could effectively charge. This was significant, as the principal tactic of the Christians was launching large-scale cavalry charges at significant moments. Furthermore, the zealous Almoravids were known to fight to the death and therefore were not easily dispersed. For Rodrigo, this new enemy was far more serious than the relatively minor battles that he had been fighting all his life.

In mid-September, the Almoravids camped near Valencia at El Cuarte and on 4 October, Muhammad rode up to the main gates with his senior commanders and units behind him. He demanded that Rodrigo surrender immediately but El Cid, who had other ideas, declined.

Rodrigo's spies had informed him that the Almoravid arrival at Valencia coincided with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, during which Muslims have to abstain from eating and drinking between sunrise and sunset. After fasting all day, many of the Almoravids slept late after a long night of heavy eating, and this routine left them increasingly tired and irritable. Rodrigo concluded that the enemy would be most vulnerable at the end of Ramadan, which in 1094 was on 14 October. All he had to do was sit out the siege for ten days before making his own attack.

However, Muhammad would not give Rodrigo an easy time. After El Cid refused the first demand to surrender, he ordered elephants to push forward six wheeled siege towers towards the city walls. Some of these towers were 30 feet high – tall enough to lower their storming bridges onto the city's battlements – and these fearsome structures were covered with rawhides that protected them from flaming arrows.

Muhammad reinforced these towers by strengthening the cordon around the city with deployments of archers, spearmen, and cavalry – making a point of displaying his elephants to the sound of trumpets. The garrison could do nothing but watch this intimidating display of Almoravid power. For eight days Muhammad appeared at the main gate, renewed his demand for surrender, taunted Rodrigo for delaying and condemned Valencia's Muslims for collaborating with El Cid during Ramadan. Afterwards, Rodrigo was alerted to the blackening skies where overdue rains were about to begin. Far from being an ominous sign, El Cid would use the weather to his advantage.

The storm of El Cid

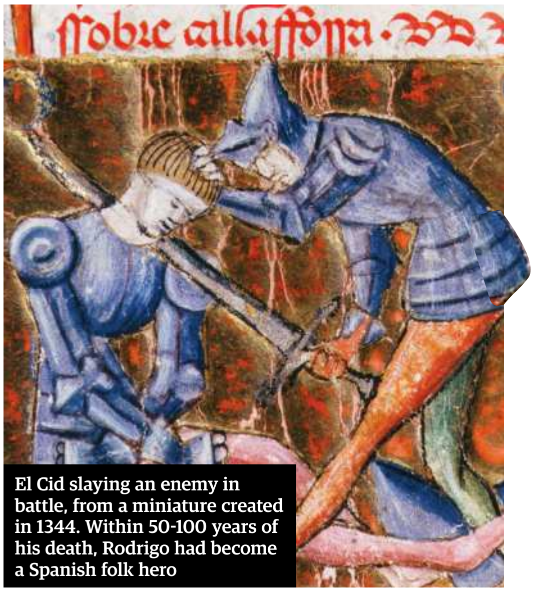
At dawn the next day, mounted knights slipped out of the west gate armed with new shields made of beech with iron reinforcements. The knights rode shoulder to shoulder in a single rank, which created the effect of a mobile shield wall. Rodrigo had picked his moment well: the Almoravids were struggling to wake from their Ramadan slumber, and as they did, the knights placed bundles of dry straw into the siege engines and set them alight. The Almoravid archers tried to shoot at the knights but the arrows were not effective against the shield wall created by the knights.

At the same time, Rodrigo divided his main force behind the walls of Valencia in two and took personal command of the lead element. Climbing onto his warhorse, Babieca, he drew his sword and charged out of the gates into the burning chaos, with the cavalry trampling soldiers, tents and supplies alike in the cordon.

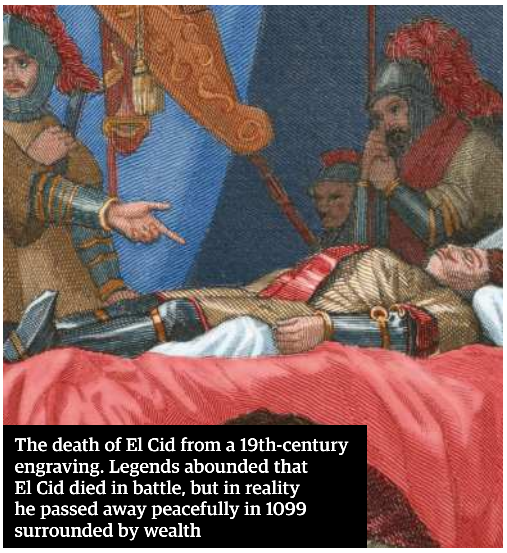
Once they had got through, Rodrigo rallied the troops to his banner as the second force smashed through the confused Almoravid rear. It was raining heavily as Rodrigo charged towards the enemy's main camp at El Cuarte. The leaderless Almoravid cavalry charged after them but they came upon a dispiriting sight – Rodrigo had used the downpour to order the irrigation weirs on the River Turia to be opened and the swollen watercourse had burst, destroying tents, supplies and wagons.

Upon seeing their camp washed away, the Almoravids were attacked on all sides by regrouped elements of Rodrigo's men. The knights killed all who resisted and elephants flailed in swampy conditions. A Christian chronicler said the victory was, "…achieved with incredible speed and with few casualties among the Christians" – while an Arab chronicler bitterly agreed: "Rodrigo – may God curse him – saw his banners favoured by victory and with a scanty number of warriors, annihilated sizable armies."

Despite his mercenary credentials, royal courts in Europe hailed Rodrigo's victory, and it is true that his triumph halted the Islamic invasion for good. However, Valencia has to be seen in context. Alfonso failed to capitalise on El Cid's achievement and the Moors would not be completely ejected from Spain until 1492. Rodrigo continued to win victories but always in his own interest, and he died peacefully at Valencia in 1099, surrounded by the spoils of his own personal fief. The man known as El Cid was a formidable soldier, but he was certainly not the ardent champion of Spain.



El Cid slaying an enemy in battle, from a miniature created in 1344. Within 50-100 years of his death, Rodrigo had become a Spanish folk hero



The death of El Cid from a 19th-century engraving. Legends abounded that El Cid died in battle, but in reality he passed away peacefully in 1099 surrounded by wealth

© Alamy, Getty Images

Warwick the Kingmaker

During an era crowded with dynamic personalities, Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, stood out as one of England's most powerful figures

Richard Neville (1428-1471) was born into a northern family of immense wealth and potent political influence. With vast northern estates, the Nevilles were reputedly able to put 10,000 troops into the field, and the future power base of Richard, an eldest son, was greatly enhanced through marriage to Anne Beauchamp: lands in the Midlands, southern England and South Wales came under his sway.

Few details of Neville's early life survive, but he made a notable entry into public life when he formally took up the title of Earl of Warwick in 1449. Given his later, unremitting interventions in English politics, it is perhaps surprising that Warwick appears to have been largely uninterested in affairs of state at this early stage of his career: he had a seat on the king's council but attended meetings rarely, if at all, during the early 1450s. Increasing animosity towards the Duke of Somerset, a passion shared both by Warwick's father (the elder Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury) and Richard, Duke of York, galvanised his political ambitions.

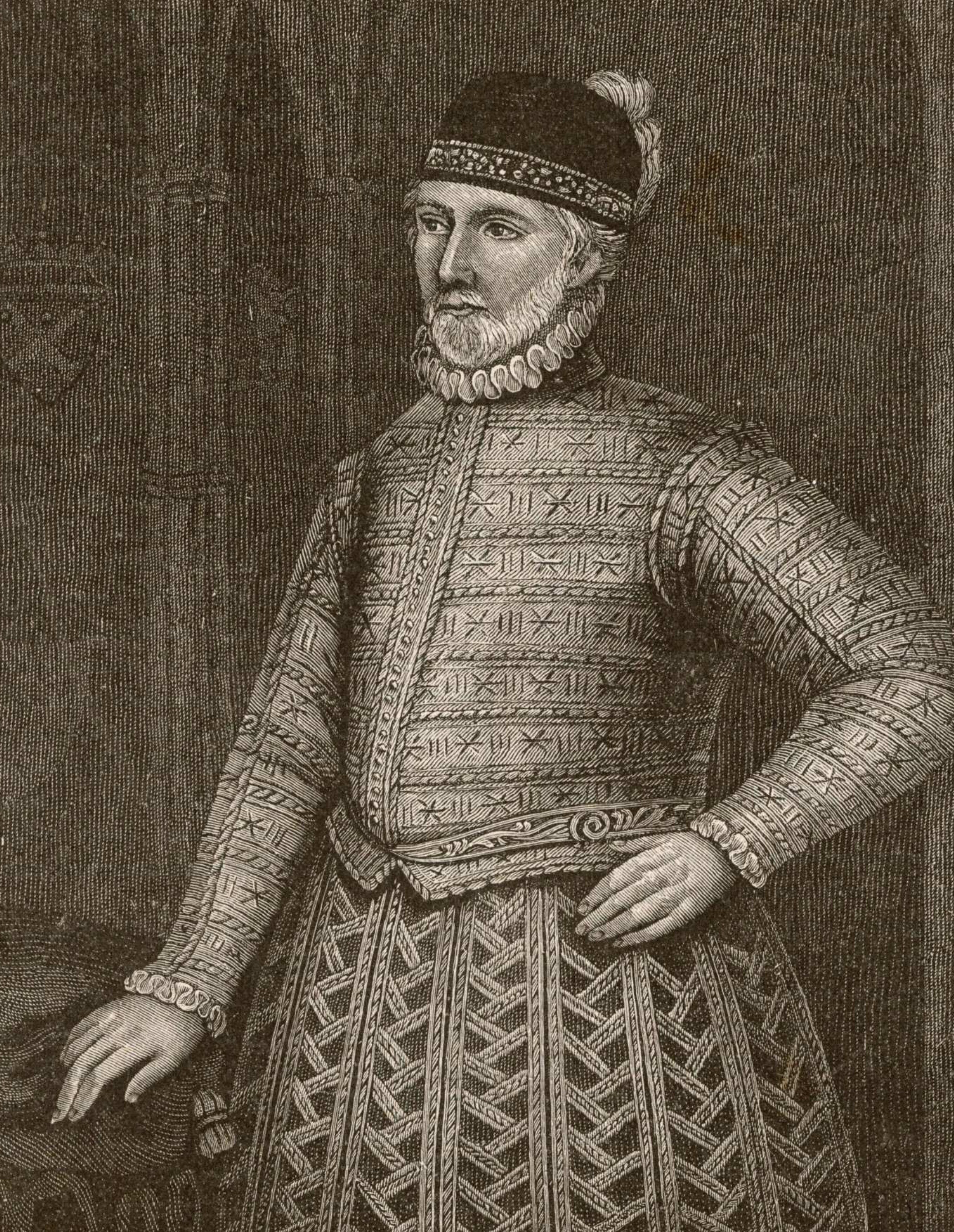
The support of the Nevilles was crucial to York's rise to influence and, while Warwick played only a minor role in York's First Protectorate (March 1454-February 1455), he emerged as a key figure following York's fall from favour. A link by marriage (the Duke of York had taken Warwick's aunt, Cecily, as his bride) also helped to secure the alliance.

> During the first three years of Edward IV's reign, the power was really held by Warwick

At the First Battle of St Albans in May 1455, Neville's surprise attack against the Lancastrian forces inside the town secured victory. York's subsequent Second Protectorate was only short lived, but one significant achievement was the election of Warwick as captain of Calais. The town was of crucial commercial and strategic importance and home to a big standing army, and its role as a Yorkist stronghold would prove vital in the coming years.

At Calais, Warwick behaved with a marked lack of diplomatic discretion, routinely assaulting ships in the English Channel (including those belonging to the Spanish and the Hanseatic League) regardless of existing treaties and truces between England and foreign powers. This secured Warwick immense popularity among the mercantile classes and an equal degree of censure from Henry VI's government. The chastisements Warwick received from Henry did little to strengthen the bonds between the two.

By 1459, Richard of York's alienation from Henry was also reaching fever pitch and, fearful of moves being made against them, York and the Nevilles launched a pre-emptive rebellion. Some 600 men from Calais, under the command of Andrew Trollope, were involved. The gambit was a disaster, culminating in defeat at Ludford Bridge, near Ludlow, in October. Yorkist troops fled the scene, the Yorkist leadership scurried for safety and acts of attainder were issued against ringleaders. Warwick was also stripped of the Calais captaincy, but the attempts to dislodge him during 1459-60, led by Henry, Duke of Somerset, proved unsuccessful.



"Edward was fully aware of how much he owed to Warwick and the Nevilles, and the earl raked in many precious rewards early on in Edward's reign"

The Yorkists had to calculate their next move. Warwick and York met in Waterford, Ireland, in March 1460, and it seems that York at least was determined to remove Henry VI from the throne. This was a controversial move in the minds of the Yorkist leadership, not least because their earlier actions had been rooted in the claim that they were set on ridding Henry of evil counsel, not replacing the king. York, however, was not deterred. A propaganda campaign was launched from the continent. Poems, some of which reached the gates of Canterbury, declared that "peace is withdrawn and God's merciful hand/Exalted is falsehood, truth is laid down" and lionised York, his son Edward - "whose fame the earth shall spread" - and, of course, "Richard, earl of Warwick, shield of our defence". When Yorkist troops arrived at Sandwich in June 1460, many Kentish men rallied to the cause and victory at Northampton on 10 July delivered the king into Yorkist hands.

By mid-October York was claiming the crown, but a compromise was reached through the Act of Accord of 25 October that allowed Henry VI to remain on the throne so long as York was named as his heir. This was a futile move since it disinherited Henry's son Edward and could only delay further conflict. By late December rival armies were clashing at the Battle of Wakefield, during which both York and Warwick's brother Thomas lost their lives.

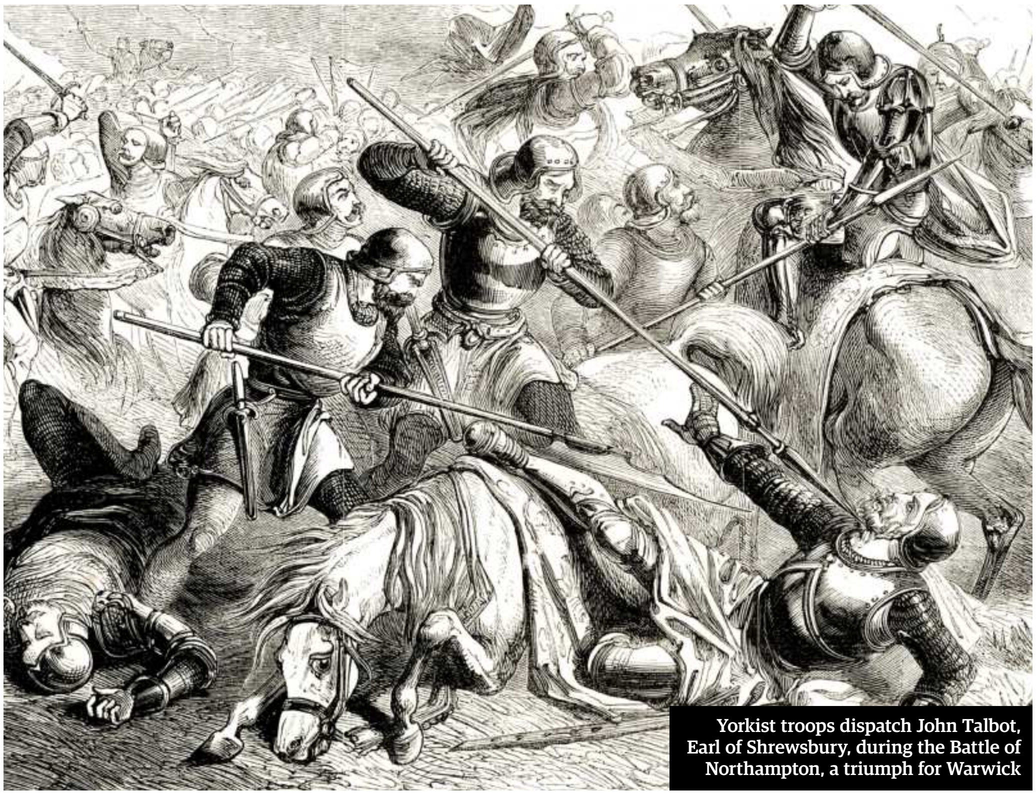
The victorious Lancastrians soon headed south, and Warwick, who had remained behind in London, went out to meet them. A major defeat was inflicted at the Second Battle of St Albans in February 1461, largely due to Warwick's clumsy strategies, but troops led by York's son Edward, fresh from victory at Mortimer's Cross, rallied to Warwick's side. By 17 February Edward and Warwick were entering London, and by March York's son had claimed the throne as Edward IV.

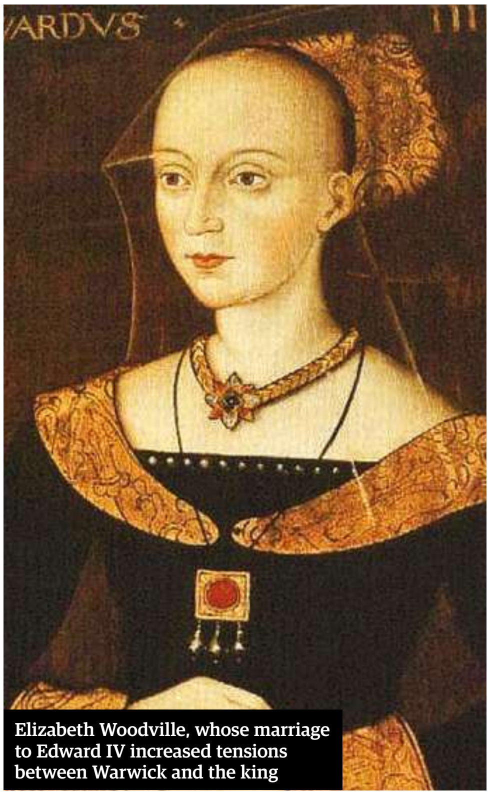
When planning an alliance with Margaret Beaufort, Warwick allegedly had to spend hours on his knees in front of her

Revenge was uppermost in Yorkist minds. As early as 29 March the Yorkists defeated the Lancastrians at Towton, by some measure the bloodiest battle of the Wars of the Roses and one involving as many as 50,000 combatants. Warwick may only have played a small role in proceedings. By November, at Edward's first parliament, Lancastrian guilt was being loudly pronounced. For decades it was averred the country had witnessed "unrest, inward war and trouble… shedding and effusion of innocent blood, abuse of the laws, partiality, riot, extortion, murder, rape and vicious living". No less than 130 leading Lancastrians were named, shamed and, in many cases, attainted.

Edward was fully aware of how much he owed to Warwick and the Nevilles, and the earl raked in many rewards early on in Edward's reign. The offices and titles showered upon him included great chamberlain of England, constable of Dover Castle, admiral of England and steward of the Duchy of Lancaster. He also received further boosts to his property and land portfolios, including eight manors seized from the Percies in Northumberland, the Westmoreland estates of John Clifford and lands in Buckinghamshire, Worcestershire and the Welsh Marches. Warwick could now rely on an annual income of at least £10,000, a sum that made him, with the exception of the king, the richest man in England.

In many ways, Warwick proved to be worth the investment. In the aftermath of Towton, Lancastrian resistance flared up in various parts of the realm, notably in Wales, the West Country and,


Yorkist troops dispatch John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, during the Battle of Northampton, a triumph for Warwick



Elizabeth Woodville, whose marriage to Edward IV increased tensions between Warwick and the king of greatest interest to Warwick, northern England. Over the next four years a dizzying round of raids and risings convulsed the region, with castles like Alnwick and Dunstanburgh routinely passing back and forth between Yorkists and Lancastrians. In his role as warden of the east and west marches on the Scottish border, Warwick, along with his brother John Neville, Lord Montagu, played a major role in resisting a Lancastrian resurgence, both through military means and by striving to deter the Scots from supporting Henry and Margaret of Anjou. The process effectively reached completion in May 1464 with the Lancastrian defeat at Hexham. The Nevilles took great pains to obliterate as much of the remaining enemy leadership as possible, with executions being mounted at Newcastle, Middleham Castle and York.

This view of the relationship between Warwick and Edward gained traction in continental circles, where Warwick appeared influential because of his extensive diplomatic adventures. Edward should not be dismissed as a pawn. It was his decision as much as Warwick's to make a bid for the throne, and his involvement in the business of government was consistent. Edward's ability to act alone would become clear.

In May 1464, the king married Elizabeth Woodville. The match was kept secret for several months, not least because Edward could anticipate the likely reaction from his counsellors. Elizabeth's social status, while rather lofty in the larger scheme of things, did not quite meet the requirements of a royal bride. When Edward eventually revealed news of his marriage in September, the council, at least according to one Burgundian chronicler, did not conceal their misgivings, telling the king that Elizabeth "was not his match, however good and fair she might be, and he must know well that she was no wife for a prince such as himself". Warwick's opinion can easily be surmised. Back in 1460, during a quarrel with Elizabeth's father, Warwick had asserted that Earl Rivers' "father was but a squire" and that it was "not his part to have the language of lords".

Just as importantly, the marriage to Woodville removed the possibility of a more obviously advantageous match with a foreign power. This is precisely what Warwick had been working towards, and Edward's actions made him appear foolish. Warwick may also have resented the fact that Edward had not seen fit to consult him on such a momentous decision. Even so, at first Warwick exhibited no open signs of disenchantment, even accompanying the new queen on her first public appearance at Reading Abbey at Michaelmas in 1464. Cracks did soon begin to show, however.

A stone cross marks the location of the Battle of Towton, where the crown was won for Edward IV

Warwick became increasingly aggravated by the direction of Edward's foreign policy: the king favoured closer diplomatic ties with the Burgundians, while Warwick wanted to pursue options with the French. Over the coming years, the rising influence of members of the queen's family at court left Warwick feeling increasingly isolated, and the seemingly endless campaign to marry off Elizabeth's female relations undermined Warwick's own familial agenda. With so many suitors snapped up by the Woodvilles, it became harder to locate matches for Warwick's daughters.

The dismissal of Warwick's brother as chancellor in June 1467 only added to Warwick's sense of alienation. He was still far away from any act of outright betrayal though, and he would remain an influential figure right up to the moment of his rebellion. Still, the seeds were already being sown from the mid-1460s, and they would yield dramatic results in the next stage of the Wars of the Roses.

When considering all this and Warwick's career as a whole, it is perhaps best to think of him as a highly talented but incorrigibly opportunistic figure. His decision to ally himself with the Yorkist cause from the 1450s did not sit naturally with family tradition, and the extent of his ambition, and greed, was prodigious. As one contemporary observed, Warwick's "insatiable mind could not be content, and yet before him was there none in England of half the possessions that he had". His antics in the Channel during the captaincy of Calais were impressive, but on land he was no strategic genius. It is possible that his intervention at the First Battle of St Albans was devised by more seasoned minds.

A streak of cruelty can be discerned in Warwick, as witnessed by his treatment of Lancastrian figures after the battle of Northampton and during his efforts to subdue resistance in the north of England in the 1460s. For some, he was a brave man: the chronicler Edward Hall wrote of him slaying his horse on a battlefield to demonstrate that he had no intention of fleeing. The Tudor writer Polydore Vergil concluded that Warwick was "not only marvellously adorned with virtues indeed, but also had a special gift, even from his infancy, in the show and setting forth of the same". His "wit was so ready, and his behaviour so courteous, that he was wonderfully beloved of the people."

Warwick's chaplain, John Rous, would doubtless have agreed, describing his master as "a famous knight and greatly spoken of through the most part of Christendom". It rather depended upon whom you asked, and the nuanced adjudication of the historian Michael Hicks is perhaps more secure. Warwick, Hicks writes, "was certainly remarkable and demands some admiration," but "we do not have to like him".

Lions of the north

The family house and leading force in English politics

Precise details remain obscure, but the mighty Nevilles most likely traced their origins back to Anglo-Saxon England. Based in County Durham, the family made astute alliances with the post-conquest Norman elite and enhanced their reputation through loyal service to the crown during troubled periods (such as the civil wars of Henry III's reign) and the repeated conflicts with France and Scotland. A Neville, for instance, would be instrumental in the defeat of the Scots at the Battle of Neville's Cross in 1346.

Their estates expanded, centred on Raby Castle but extending to Northumberland, Cumbria, Lancashire and beyond. High office arrived too, and Nevilles were to be found as archbishops of York, stewards of the Marches on the Scottish borders and, from 1397, the family gained the title of earls of Westmoreland. The earldoms of Salisbury and Warwick would be secured during the 15th century.

The Nevilles supported Henry of Bolingbroke in his 1399 seizure of the crown from Richard II and, while this brought favour from Henry IV, the family also endured a significant schism between the branches based at Raby and at the other major seat of Middleham.

Though addicted to involvement in national affairs, many of the Nevilles' actions, including their choices of allegiance during the Wars of the Roses, were guided by hostility aimed at their great rivals in the north, the Percy family.

The stone Neville Screen behind the altar at Durham Cathedral, erected in 1380 and a suitably lavish gift from the wealthy family

© Alamy, Getty Images

Richard the Lionheart

Born to royalty but educated in the charnel gutter of war, King Richard brought the religious fanaticism of the Christian West to the Muslim East in a quest to claim the fabled Holy Land

For almost a year the mighty city of Acre held firm. Despite wave after wave of Christian knights pouring all their religious fervour and military might against its ancient walls, it had held back the tide and halted the progress of the foreign hordes that now threatened to overrun the Near East.

More and more men came, though - the attacks were relentless. When the first army had been held at bay, the city's inhabitants thought they were safe, that the invasion was defeated. However, then yet another army landed and the city's main artery, its port, which provided passage in and out of its walls, was taken. The city's defences were tested once more, with an even more ferocious attack battering at the doors and calling for blood. Luckily for those within, once more the city held off the mass of warriors, its infidel leaders repelled.

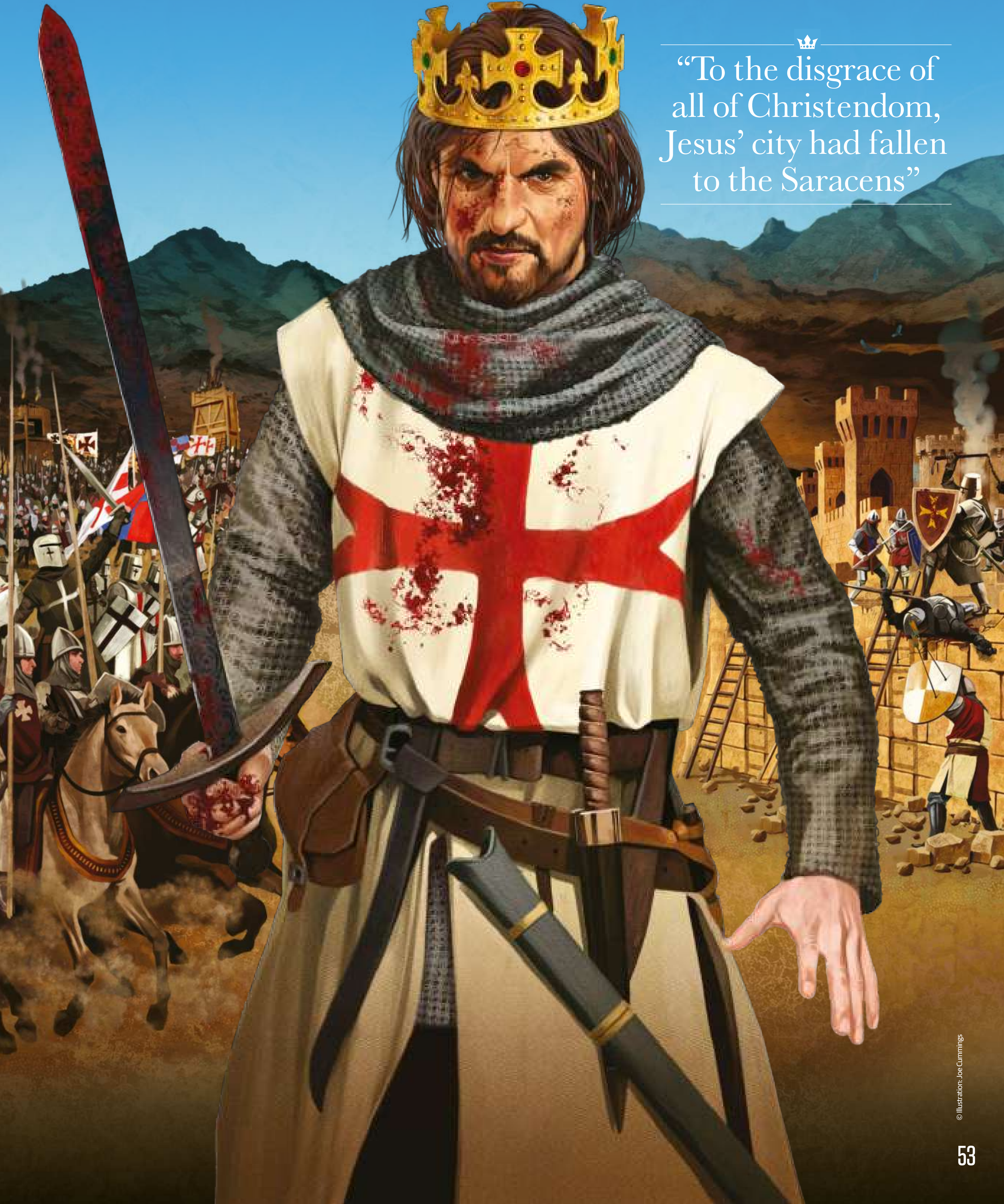
Then, with the new year's sailing season, another invader arrived by sea with a fresh bloodthirsty army. He was followed in May by yet another, with tens of thousands of soldiers joining the infidels' camp outside the walls, swelling their numbers to terrifying proportions. They attacked again and the losses on both sides were huge. The lack of food and supplies in the city, and the spread of disease within the invaders' camp, drove the warriors to extremes, stoking the fires of faith that lay within their hearts to pursue bolder acts of violence.

Today is the eighth day of June 1191 and, as Acre slowly suffocates in the oppressive heat of the Levant's summer months, yet another fleet is landing in the city's once-prosperous port, this time with one of the biggest forces that the city has ever seen. If the ruler of Acre, the noble and great Saladin, doesn't send meaningful reinforcements soon, then the city will fall and the gates to the Holy Land will be brutally wrenched open to the Christian hordes.

In his whole reign as king of England, Richard actually only spent about six months in England

They call this one, this man-mountain stepping off his ship onto the dusty dry shore, the Lionheart, and he is here to kill them all in the name of his god and glory. The passage had been long and painful, featuring storms, shipwrecks and a mad despot who threatened to derail the Third Crusade before it had even begun. No matter; King Richard the Lionheart and his army have survived the trip across the Mediterranean Sea and reached the Holy Land. After months of pursuit and planning, they are primed to fulfil their mission, Richard's mission, God's mission, to take the Holy Land by storm and cut a direct path to the holiest of all cities, Jerusalem itself.

To the disgrace of all of Christendom, Jesus' city had fallen four years previous to the Saracen Ayyubid hordes, which was now not only ruled by Christianity's arch-nemesis Saladin, but also defiled by their very presence within its hallowed walls. The city, which had been safely held in Christian hands for almost 100 years since the First Crusade had established the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1099, had been ordered to be retaken by none other than the Pope in Rome. Richard, a devout and deeply religious king, had heeded the call. Here he now

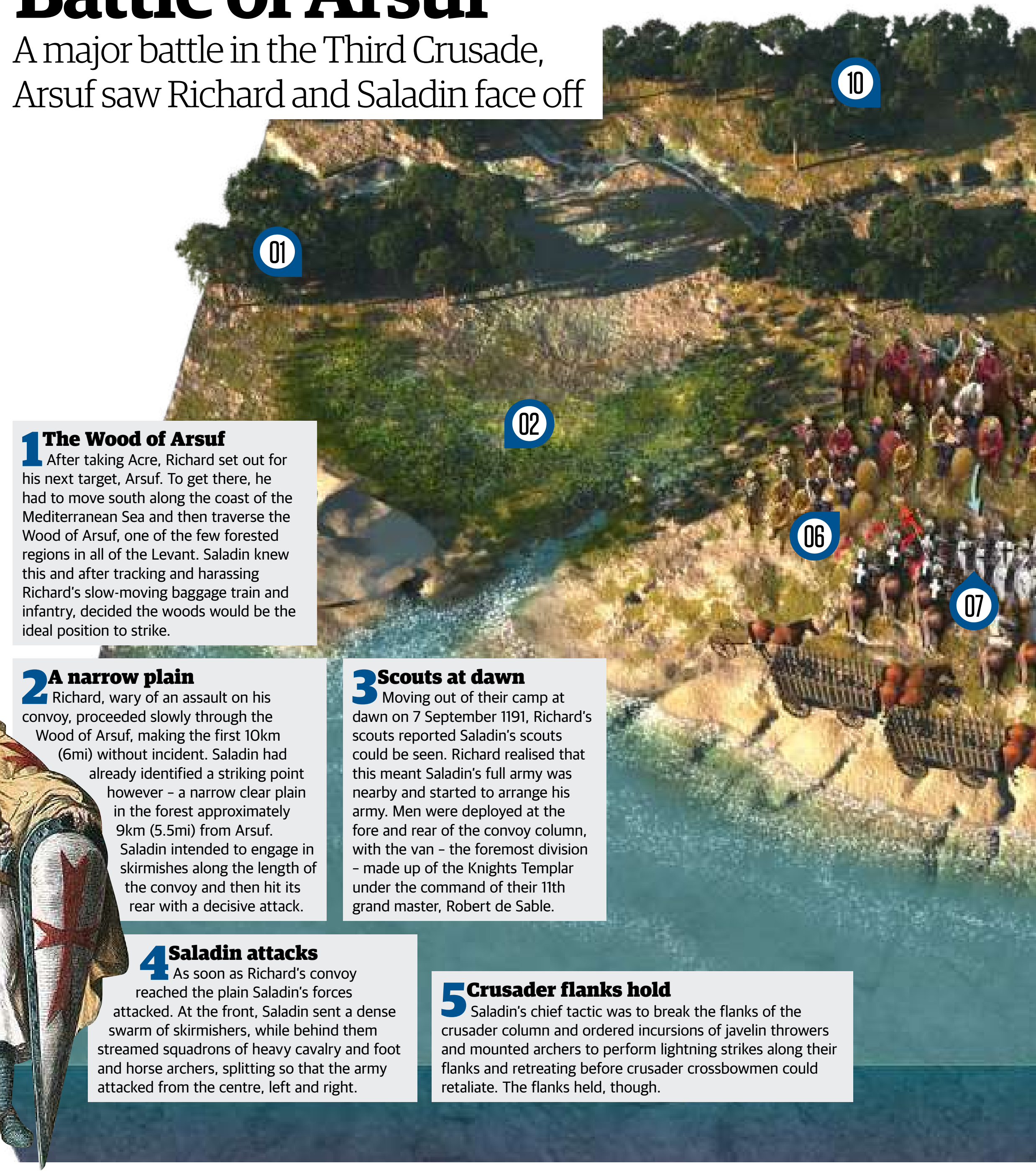


“To the disgrace of all of Christendom, Jesus’ city had fallen to the Saracens”

© Illustration: Joe Cummings

Battle of Arsuf

A major battle in the Third Crusade, Arsuf saw Richard and Saladin face off



1 The Wood of Arsuf

After taking Acre, Richard set out for his next target, Arsuf. To get there, he had to move south along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and then traverse the Wood of Arsuf, one of the few forested regions in all of the Levant. Saladin knew this and after tracking and harassing Richard's slow-moving baggage train and infantry, decided the woods would be the ideal position to strike.

2 A narrow plain

Richard, wary of an assault on his convoy, proceeded slowly through the Wood of Arsuf, making the first 10km (6mi) without incident. Saladin had already identified a striking point however – a narrow clear plain in the forest approximately 9km (5.5mi) from Arsuf. Saladin intended to engage in skirmishes along the length of the convoy and then hit its rear with a decisive attack.

3 Scouts at dawn

Moving out of their camp at dawn on 7 September 1191, Richard's scouts reported Saladin's scouts could be seen. Richard realised that this meant Saladin's full army was nearby and started to arrange his army. Men were deployed at the fore and rear of the convoy column, with the van – the foremost division – made up of the Knights Templar under the command of their 11th grand master, Robert de Sable.

4 Saladin attacks

As soon as Richard's convoy reached the plain Saladin's forces attacked. At the front, Saladin sent a dense swarm of skirmishers, while behind them streamed squadrons of heavy cavalry and foot and horse archers, splitting so that the army attacked from the centre, left and right.

5 Crusader flanks hold

Saladin's chief tactic was to break the flanks of the crusader column and ordered incursions of javelin throwers and mounted archers to perform lightning strikes along their flanks and retreating before crusader crossbowmen could retaliate. The flanks held, though.

stood, ready to do his duty to the one true god. Conquering Acre was merely the first step in wresting Jerusalem from Saladin's iron grip.

So far the city's capture and wider crusade had been in the hands of a number of other leaders. These included Guy of Lusignan – a proud Poitevin knight and the supposed rightful king of Jerusalem through his marriage to Sibylla of Jerusalem – and King Philip II of France, who had helped raise the 'Saladin tithe' to pay for the crusade. The Duke of Austria, Leopold V, had overall command of the imperial forces.

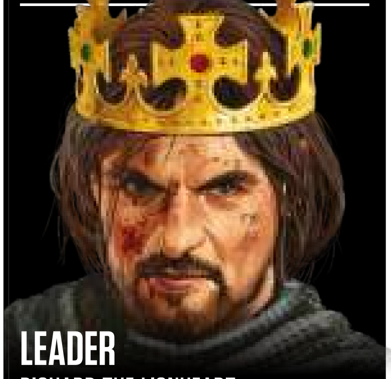
There had been yet more leaders at the siege's instigation the previous summer, but illness and disease had claimed many over the winter months, with Frederick of Swabia and even the holy Patriarch Heraclius of Jerusalem all passing from this mortal world into the next.

The siege itself had stalled, so every passing week threatened to allow Saladin to outmanoeuvre the crusaders. Richard, being the honed and experienced military leader that he was, realised this and after meeting with

Counter seal (1195) of Richard I of England

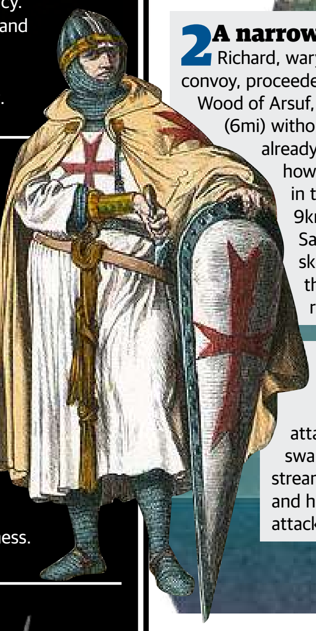
Crusaders

NUMBER OF TROOPS:
20,000



LEADER
RICHARD THE LIONHEART

Excellent on the battlefield, Richard the Lionheart was a brutal killer and a gifted tactical thinker, leading an army of religious fanatics with ruthless efficiency.
Strengths Amazing warrior and powerful military leader.
Weaknesses Politically and economically reckless as king.

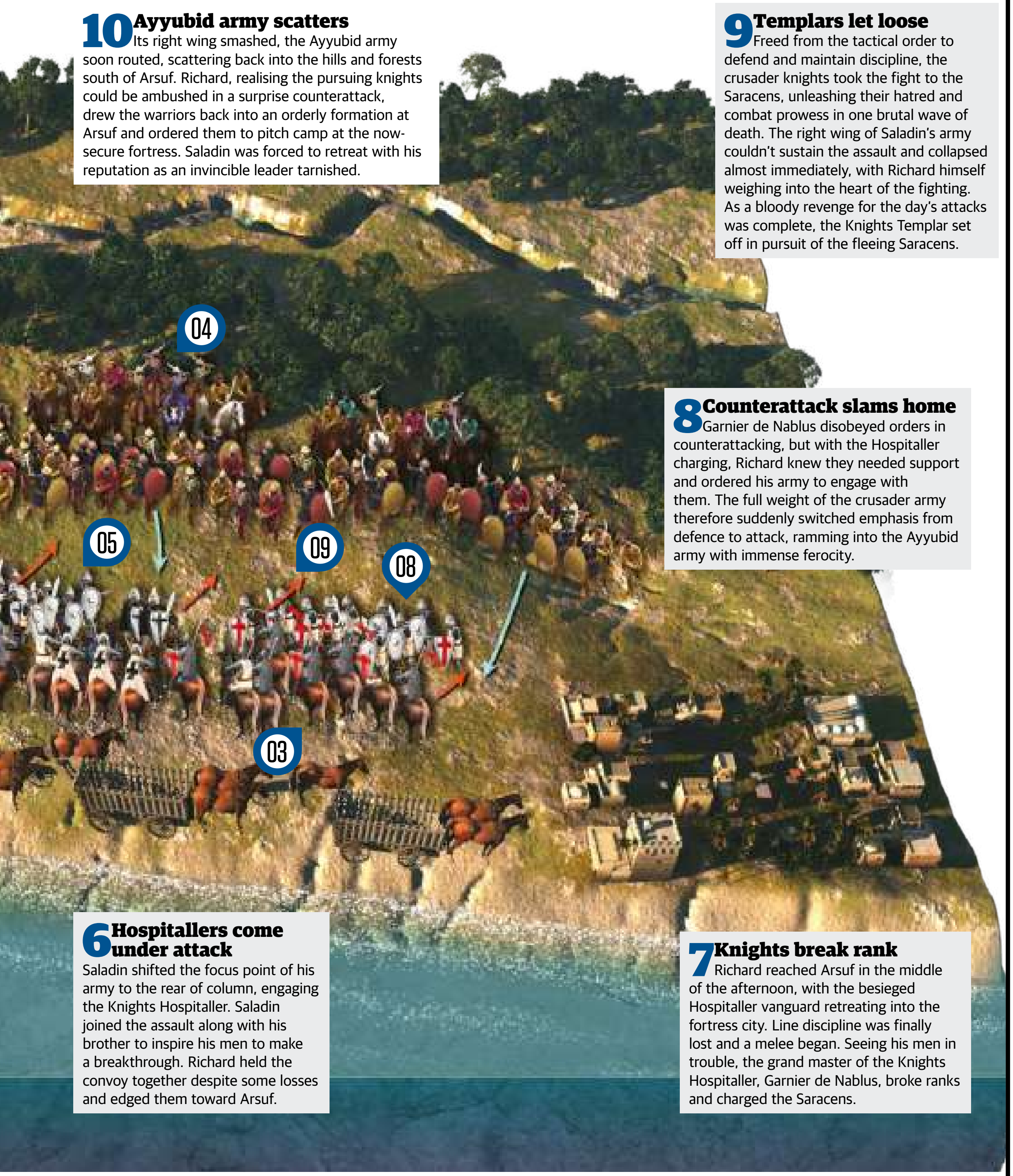


KEY UNIT
TEMPLAR KNIGHT

The most skilled Christian fighting unit to take part in the Third Crusade, the Knights Templar were wealthy, well-trained and fanatical fighters, driven by a holy purpose.
Strengths Well-equipped and trained in hand-to-hand combat.
Weaknesses Few in number and fanatically religious, leading to recklessness.

KEY WEAPON
BROADSWORD

The most popular hand-to-hand weapon of all Christian knight orders, including the Knights Templar and Knights Hospitaller, the broadsword was a well-balanced and deadly weapon capable of stabbing and cleaving.
Strengths Great all-round weapon that also allowed shield use.
Weaknesses Could be out-ranged with two-handed swords and spears.



10 Ayyubid army scatters

Its right wing smashed, the Ayyubid army soon routed, scattering back into the hills and forests south of Arsuf. Richard, realising the pursuing knights could be ambushed in a surprise counterattack, drew the warriors back into an orderly formation at Arsuf and ordered them to pitch camp at the now-secure fortress. Saladin was forced to retreat with his reputation as an invincible leader tarnished.

9 Templars let loose

Freed from the tactical order to defend and maintain discipline, the crusader knights took the fight to the Saracens, unleashing their hatred and combat prowess in one brutal wave of death. The right wing of Saladin's army couldn't sustain the assault and collapsed almost immediately, with Richard himself weighing into the heart of the fighting. As a bloody revenge for the day's attacks was complete, the Knights Templar set off in pursuit of the fleeing Saracens.

8 Counterattack slams home

Garnier de Nablus disobeyed orders in counterattacking, but with the Hospitaller charging, Richard knew they needed support and ordered his army to engage with them. The full weight of the crusader army therefore suddenly switched emphasis from defence to attack, ramming into the Ayyubid army with immense ferocity.

6 Hospitallers come under attack

Saladin shifted the focus point of his army to the rear of column, engaging the Knights Hospitaller. Saladin joined the assault along with his brother to inspire his men to make a breakthrough. Richard held the convoy together despite some losses and edged them toward Arsuf.

7 Knights break rank

Richard reached Arsuf in the middle of the afternoon, with the besieged Hospitaller vanguard retreating into the fortress city. Line discipline was finally lost and a melee began. Seeing his men in trouble, the grand master of the Knights Hospitaller, Garnier de Nablus, broke ranks and charged the Saracens.

the other leaders, gave orders for vast siege engines to be built, ones that could bring down the city's walls. These engines, these machines of death, once completed, towered over the Christian knights and, when unleashed, brought the siege into a deadly endgame for all.

Colossal boulders rained down upon Acre's walls, smashing against them with thunderous brutality. Corpses of animals and Muslim soldiers littered the city's streets, spreading disease and sapping the morale of the terrified residents. Most fearsome of all though, flaming balls and arrows set ablaze anything that wasn't made out of stone, causing panic to quickly spread among Acre's populace. The surviving Muslim soldiers defended bravely, but the sheer carnage and chaos the machines and men of war now levied on the city was too much and, after a month of death and destruction, the remaining Muslim garrison within the city surrendered, which was a direct violation of Saladin's orders.

Upon receiving the news of Acre's fall, Saladin immediately set out for the city with reinforcements. On his way he received news that Richard had taken the surrendering Muslim garrison of 2,400 men captive and was offering their return for a ransom. Saladin, known for his fierce loyalty to his men and his wisdom, agreed to the ransom, which not only included significant

Muslims

NUMBER OF TROOPS:

25,000

LEADER

SALADIN

He attained his exalted position as leader of the Ayyubid army and founder of the Ayyubid dynasty and was a wise and experienced military commander.

Strengths Respected tactical thinker and powerful politician.

Weaknesses Hands-off leader with little personal combat prowess.

◆

KEY UNIT

MOUNTED ARCHER

The light cavalry of Saladin was feared throughout the world due to its infamous ability to strike quickly and at range, with many skilled marksmen riding the world's fastest horses.

Strengths Fast units that excelled in ambush and hit-and-run attacks.

Weaknesses Easily cut down by knights in hand-to-hand combat.

◆

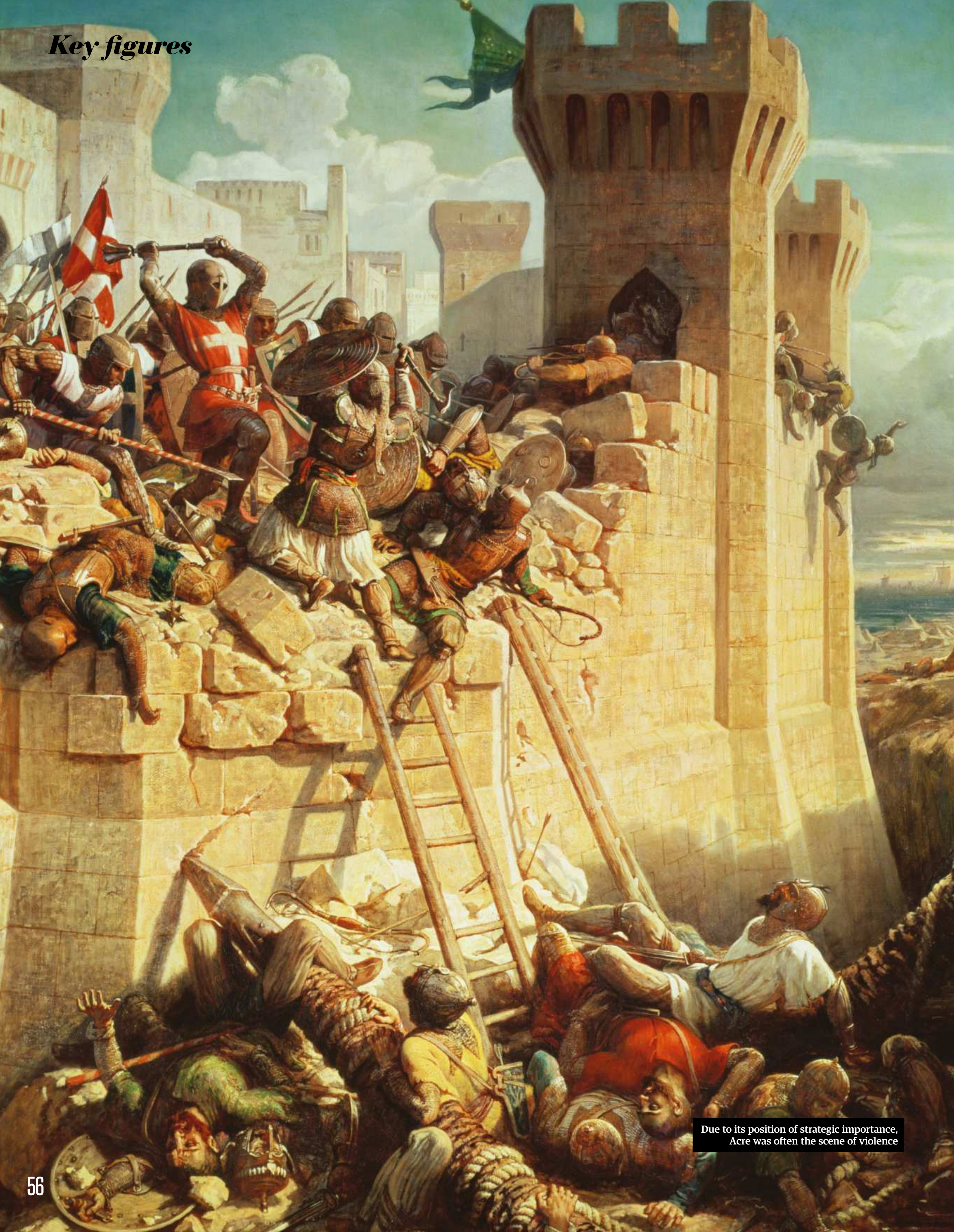
KEY WEAPON

SHORT BOW

The most popular hand-to-hand weapon of all Christian knight orders, including the Knights Templar and Knights Hospitaller, the broadsword was a well-balanced and deadly weapon capable of stabbing and cleaving.

Strengths Great all-round weapon that also allowed shield use.

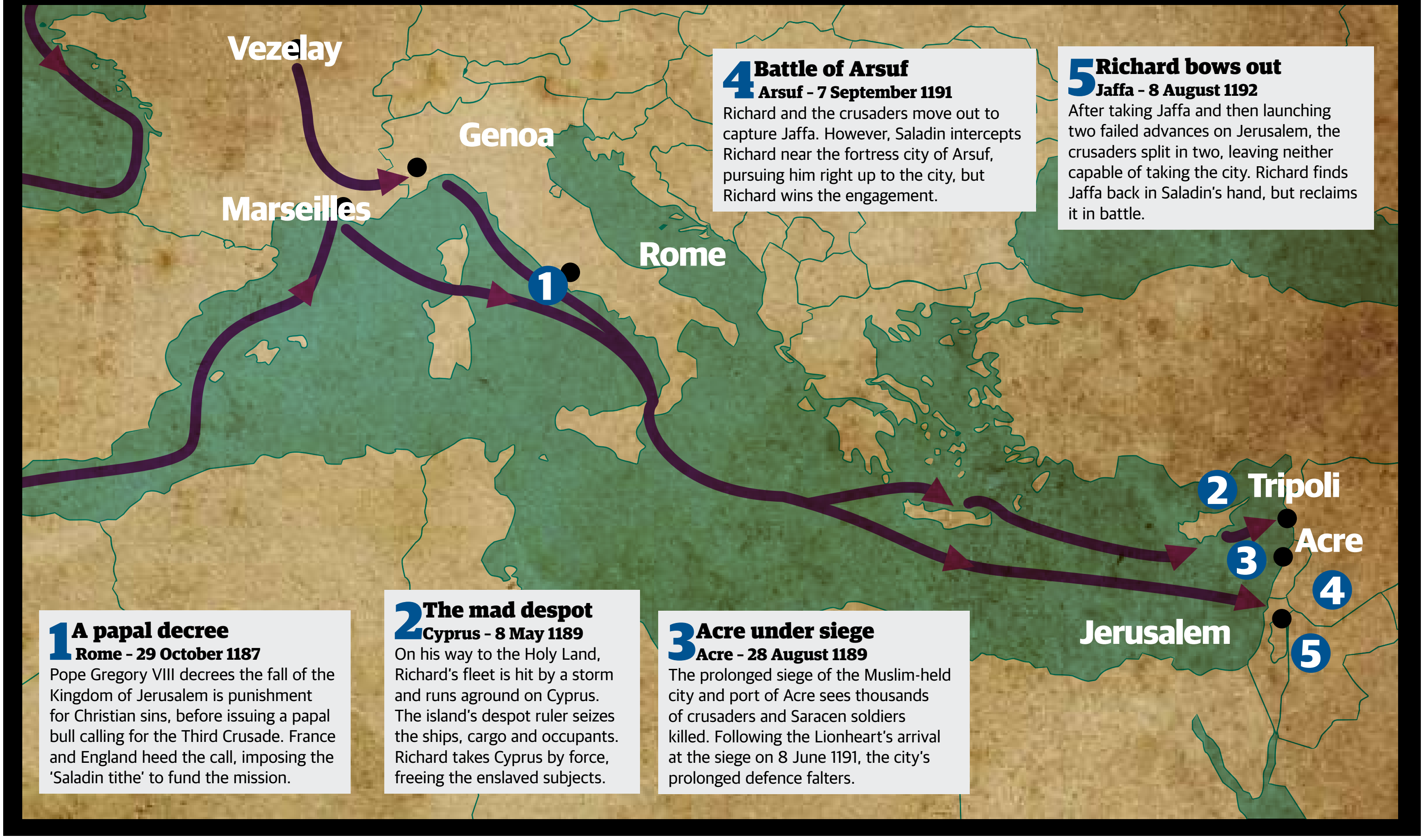
Weaknesses Could be out-ranged with two-handed swords and spears.



Due to its position of strategic importance, Acre was often the scene of violence

Lionheart's crusade

The Third Crusade faced challenges even before reaching the Holy Land



1 A papal decree
Rome - 29 October 1187
Pope Gregory VIII decrees the fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem is punishment for Christian sins, before issuing a papal bull calling for the Third Crusade. France and England heed the call, imposing the 'Saladin tithe' to fund the mission.

2 The mad despot
Cyprus - 8 May 1189
On his way to the Holy Land, Richard's fleet is hit by a storm and runs aground on Cyprus. The island's despot ruler seizes the ships, cargo and occupants. Richard takes Cyprus by force, freeing the enslaved subjects.

3 Acre under siege
Acre - 28 August 1189
The prolonged siege of the Muslim-held city and port of Acre sees thousands of crusaders and Saracen soldiers killed. Following the Lionheart's arrival at the siege on 8 June 1191, the city's prolonged defence falters.

4 Battle of Arsuf
Arsuf - 7 September 1191
Richard and the crusaders move out to capture Jaffa. However, Saladin intercepts Richard near the fortress city of Arsuf, pursuing him right up to the city, but Richard wins the engagement.

5 Richard bows out
Jaffa - 8 August 1192
After taking Jaffa and then launching two failed advances on Jerusalem, the crusaders split in two, leaving neither capable of taking the city. Richard finds Jaffa back in Saladin's hand, but reclaims it in battle.

> "The enraged Saladin replied like-for-like, executing the 1,000 Christian prisoners in his custody"

The city of Acre as it looks today

monetary compensation but also the release of all of his Christian prisoners.

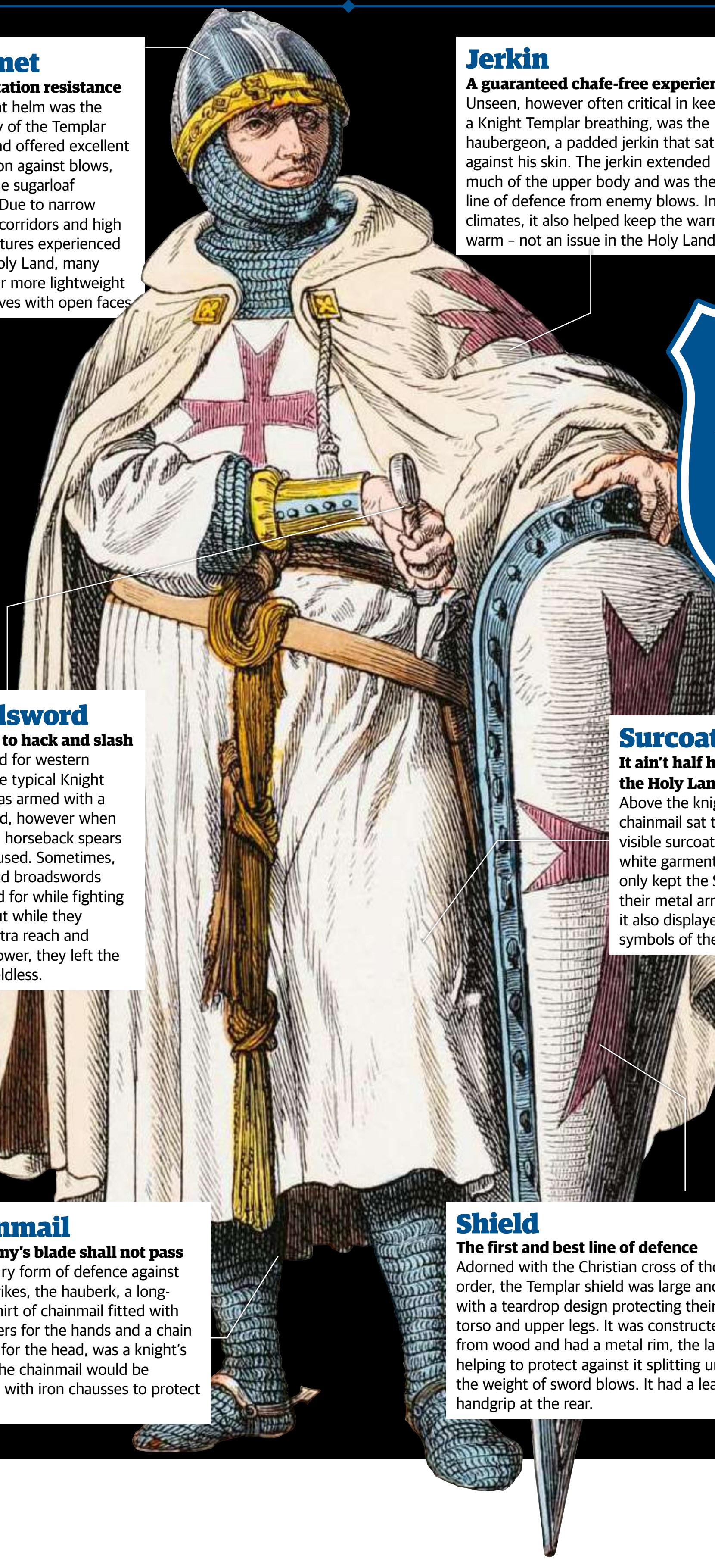
In Acre the banners of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, France, England and the Duchy of Austria fluttered in the light breeze. With Acre down, Richard knew that only the city of Jaffa to the south stood in their way of making a direct assault on Jerusalem, so he began making preparations for the continued crusade, as well as for the reparation of the sacked city. These preparations were swiftly interrupted by an argument that developed between the conquering leaders as to how the city should be divided up and to how the spoils of their victory should be apportioned. This quarrelling led Richard to strike down the Austrian standard from above the city's walls, slighting Leopold, as the king of England sided with Guy of Lusignan rather than Philip and Leopold over who should become king of Jerusalem when the city was taken. Philip and Leopold preferred fellow crusader and Italian nobleman Conrad of Montferrat, with Phillip so angry he threatened to return to Europe.

This cauldron of scheming and disagreement was tipped over the edge when Saladin delayed paying the garrison's ransom. An already irate and disgruntled Richard deemed the lateness a massive slight and ordered every single one of the garrison to be executed. Saladin reached the city just as the decision was made, but could only watch as man after man was publicly executed, their heads lopped from their shoulders atop the city walls. Thousands died. The enraged Saladin replied like-for-like, executing the 1,000 Christian prisoners in his custody. Whatever deal that could conceivably have been reached between the rival leaders now lay in ruins, seemingly as dead as the unfortunate prisoners.

Angered and frustrated with Richard and Guy, Philip and Leopold finally decided that their participation in the Third Crusade was at an end, leaving in late August for their European homes. For Richard, though, such betrayal of faith was

Anatomy of a Templar knight

The key kit and weapons carried by the most elite of Christian warriors



Helmet

Decapitation resistance

The great helm was the mainstay of the Templar Order and offered excellent protection against blows, as did the sugarloaf helmet. Due to narrow viewing corridors and high temperatures experienced in the Holy Land, many opted for more lightweight alternatives with open faces

Jerkin

A guaranteed chafe-free experience

Unseen, however often critical in keeping a Knight Templar breathing, was the haubergeon, a padded jerkin that sat against his skin. The jerkin extended over much of the upper body and was the last line of defence from enemy blows. In colder climates, it also helped keep the warrior warm – not an issue in the Holy Land.

Broadsword

Designed to hack and slash

As standard for western knights, the typical Knight Templar was armed with a broadsword, however when fighting on horseback spears were also used. Sometimes, two-handed broadswords were opted for while fighting on foot, but while they granted extra reach and cleaving power, they left the knight shieldless.

Surcoat

It ain't half hot in the Holy Land

Above the knight's chainmail sat the visible surcoat. This white garment not only kept the Sun off their metal armour, it also displayed the symbols of the Order.

Chainmail

Thy enemy's blade shall not pass

The primary form of defence against enemy strikes, the hauberk, a long-sleeved shirt of chainmail fitted with chain covers for the hands and a chain coif hood for the head, was a knight's armour. The chainmail would be partnered with iron chausses to protect their legs.

Shield

The first and best line of defence

Adorned with the Christian cross of their order, the Templar shield was large and long, with a teardrop design protecting their entire torso and upper legs. It was constructed from wood and had a metal rim, the latter helping to protect against it splitting under the weight of sword blows. It had a leather handgrip at the rear.

unimaginable, and after calling on Philip to do right in the eyes of God, managed to persuade him to leave behind 10,000 French crusaders, along with the necessary funds to pay for their upkeep. The Lionheart was now the central remaining commander of over 20,000 crusaders, knights and soldiers alike and, burning with glorious purpose, ordered the continuation of the crusade, with the bulk of the crusading army marching out of Acre in August's final days. This was no doubt who was now leading this holy crusade.

The next city on the crusaders' relentless march to Jerusalem was Jaffa, an important port that provided passage into the southern Mediterranean Sea. As long as Jaffa remained untaken Saladin had a natural avenue to pour more of his troops into the region from his impregnable stronghold of Egypt, but if it fell to the crusaders Saladin would be forced to move men over land, a far less effective and more time-consuming proposition. The city also lay a mere 65 kilometres (40 miles) from Jerusalem, making it the ideal coastal base for crusaders. Before it could be taken, though, the crusaders needed to get there in one piece. Richard knew Saladin was somewhere in the nearby area and, aware of his enemy's skill in arranging ambushes, ordered his troops to march down the Mediterranean coastline, with the baggage train protected by being nearest to the coast. This tactic prevented Saladin from attacking on one flank, as Richard also got his fleet to sail down the coast in parallel with them, shutting off the sea as an avenue of possible attack.

At the age of nine, Richard was betrothed to Princess Alais of France, but they never married

However, to the north of Jaffa lay the Wood of Arsuf, one of the only forested areas in all of the Levant. The woods ran parallel to the coastline for over 20 kilometres (12 miles) and had to be traversed by Richard's army if they were to reach Jaffa. After harassing Richard's troops with small hit-and-run attacks within the woods, Saladin sanctioned a full-scale assault on the crusaders,

"Saladin could only watch as man after man was publicly executed, their heads lopped from their shoulders atop the city walls" which led to the largest pitched battle of the Third Crusade. Saladin knew the battle would be decisive, but couldn't possibly have foreseen how disastrous for him it would be. As the Sun went down on 7 September 1191 the Saracen army had been routed in a decisive counterattack led by Richard's Knights Hospitaller. Saladin retreated from Arsuf to regroup what was left of his battered army and lick his wounds.

The crusaders made a beeline for Jaffa, swiftly besieging and taking it. Despite some disagreement with the other crusader leaders, Richard - with Jerusalem almost in sight - decided to open negotiations with his enemy. Saladin, who was being questioned by some of his subjects following the defeat at Arsuf, agreed to the negotiations and sent his brother, Al-Adil to Jaffa to lead the talks. Despite headway being made - at one time Richard's sister Joan was being talked about as a potential bride for Al-Adil with Jerusalem as a wedding gift to the couple - the talks ultimately broke down.

The breakdown of the talks caused unrest in the crusader ranks, with arguments arising about the best way to proceed toward their goal. Richard, growing tired of the constant in-fighting, acted decisively and ordered the army to move on Jerusalem in November, first moving through Ascalon and then Latrun. The Christian army was soon at Beit Nuba, a mere 20 kilometres (12 miles) from Jerusalem. The news quickly spread of the crusaders' progress and the morale in the Muslim garrisons within the city crumbled. Saladin's forces had been crushed, Acre, Arsuf and Jaffa taken and Jerusalem looked set to be next. Victory for the Third Crusade seemed inevitable at the time.

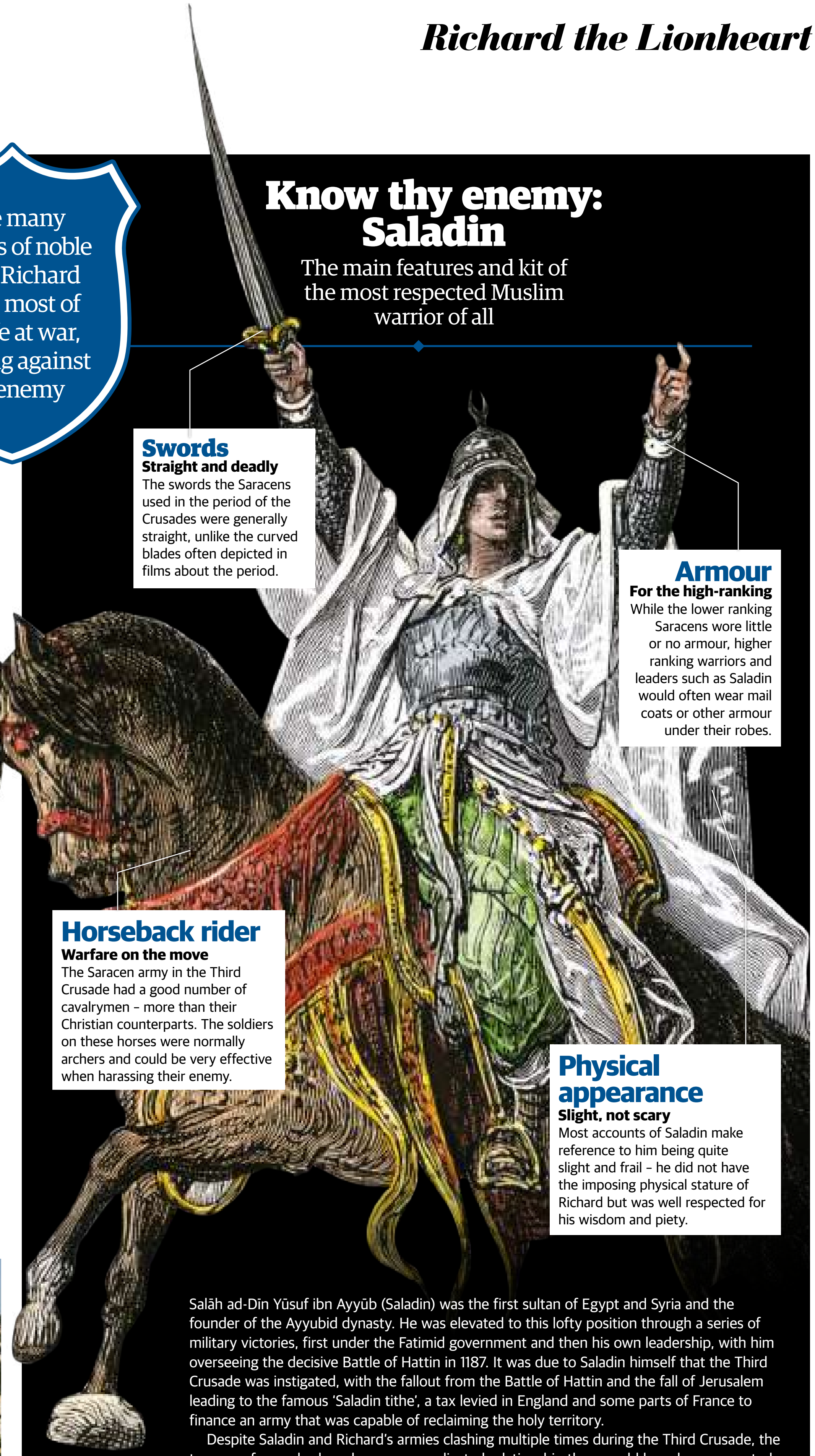
At this vital point hesitation crept into the crusader ranks, though. Saladin had proven himself a worthy and tricky foe and, not knowing the extent to which his forces had been depleted, Richard feared that a retaliation attack, most likely another large-scale ambush, was very near. In addition, the weather in the winter months had taken a marked turn for the worse, with heavy rain

> Like many knights of noble birth, Richard spent most of his life at war, fighting against the enemy

The modern day city of Jerusalem

Know thy enemy: Saladin

The main features and kit of the most respected Muslim warrior of all



Swords

Straight and deadly

The swords the Saracens used in the period of the Crusades were generally straight, unlike the curved blades often depicted in films about the period.

Armour

For the high-ranking

While the lower ranking Saracens wore little or no armour, higher ranking warriors and leaders such as Saladin would often wear mail coats or other armour under their robes.

Horseback rider

Warfare on the move

The Saracen army in the Third Crusade had a good number of cavalrymen – more than their Christian counterparts. The soldiers on these horses were normally archers and could be very effective when harassing their enemy.

Physical appearance

Slight, not scary

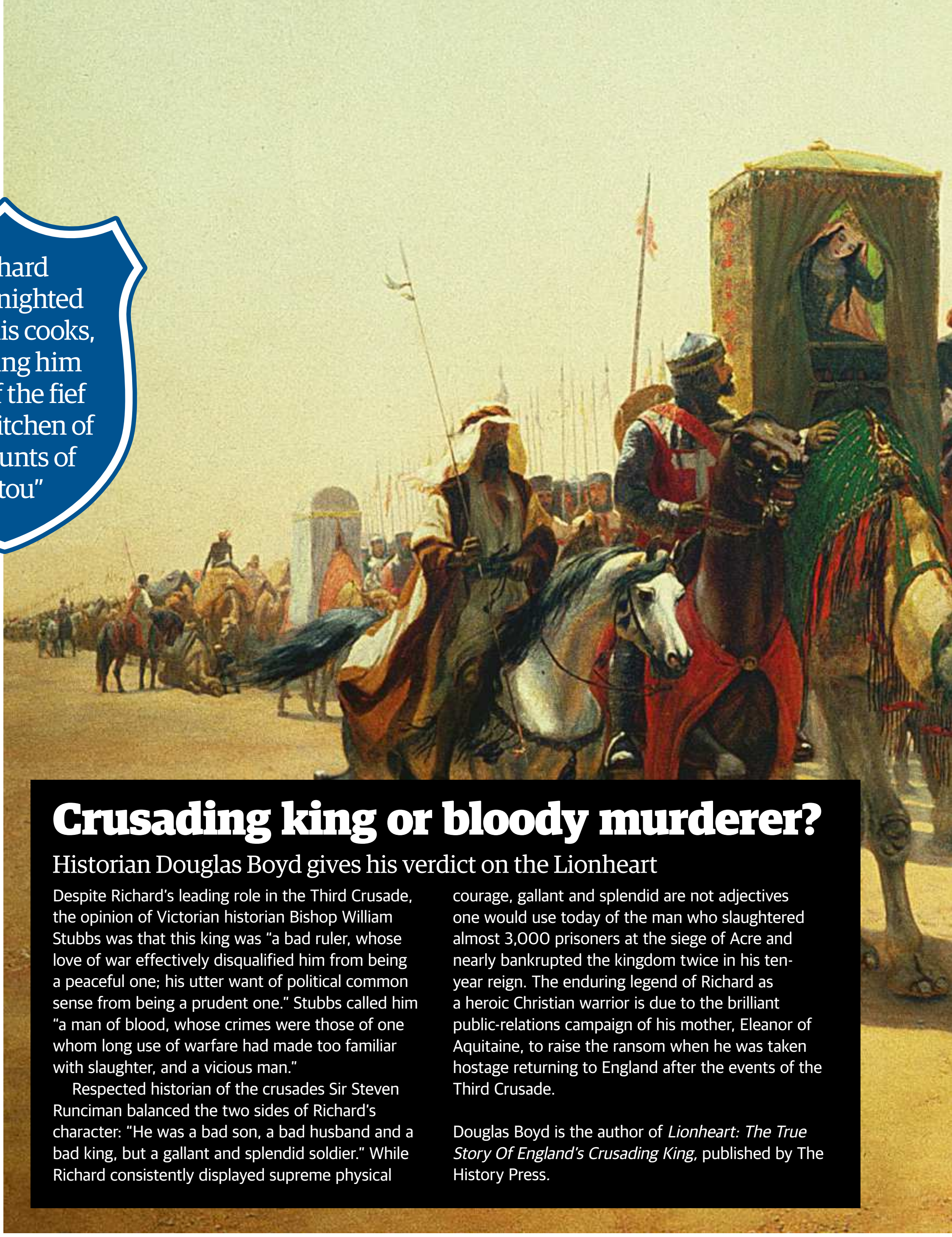
Most accounts of Saladin make reference to him being quite slight and frail – he did not have the imposing physical stature of Richard but was well respected for his wisdom and piety.

Salāh ad-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb (Saladin) was the first sultan of Egypt and Syria and the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty. He was elevated to this lofty position through a series of military victories, first under the Fatimid government and then his own leadership, with him overseeing the decisive Battle of Hattin in 1187. It was due to Saladin himself that the Third Crusade was instigated, with the fallout from the Battle of Hattin and the fall of Jerusalem leading to the famous 'Saladin tithe', a tax levied in England and some parts of France to finance an army that was capable of reclaiming the holy territory.

Despite Saladin and Richard's armies clashing multiple times during the Third Crusade, the two men famously shared a more complicated relationship than would have been expected, with great respect reported on both sides. After the Battle of Arsuf – a battle in which Saladin's army was soundly beaten – Saladin sent Richard two excellent horses as Richard had lost his own in the battle. The two men never met in person, though, and Saladin died a year after the Third Crusade, struck down by a fever while staying in Damascus.

and hail leading to poor conditions under foot. These factors caused Richard to pause for much thought rather than just make straight for the holy city and he then consulted his fellow crusaders. It was agreed that if they started besieging Jerusalem and were then hit with a relieving force from Saladin, the generally poor conditions would lead to a massacre. As such, Richard ordered a retreat back to the coast. The attack would have to wait.

> Richard once knighted one of his cooks, declaring him "lord of the fief of the kitchen of the counts of Poitou"



Crusading king or bloody murderer?

Historian Douglas Boyd gives his verdict on the Lionheart

Despite Richard's leading role in the Third Crusade, the opinion of Victorian historian Bishop William Stubbs was that this king was "a bad ruler, whose love of war effectively disqualified him from being a peaceful one; his utter want of political common sense from being a prudent one." Stubbs called him "a man of blood, whose crimes were those of one whom long use of warfare had made too familiar with slaughter, and a vicious man."

Respected historian of the crusades Sir Steven Runciman balanced the two sides of Richard's character: "He was a bad son, a bad husband and a bad king, but a gallant and splendid soldier." While Richard consistently displayed supreme physical courage, gallant and splendid are not adjectives one would use today of the man who slaughtered almost 3,000 prisoners at the siege of Acre and nearly bankrupted the kingdom twice in his ten-year reign. The enduring legend of Richard as a heroic Christian warrior is due to the brilliant public-relations campaign of his mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, to raise the ransom when he was taken hostage returning to England after the events of the Third Crusade.

Douglas Boyd is the author of *Lionheart: The True Story Of England's Crusading King*, published by The History Press.

> "Richard believed the best way to take Jerusalem was not to besiege it but to attack Saladin directly in Egypt"

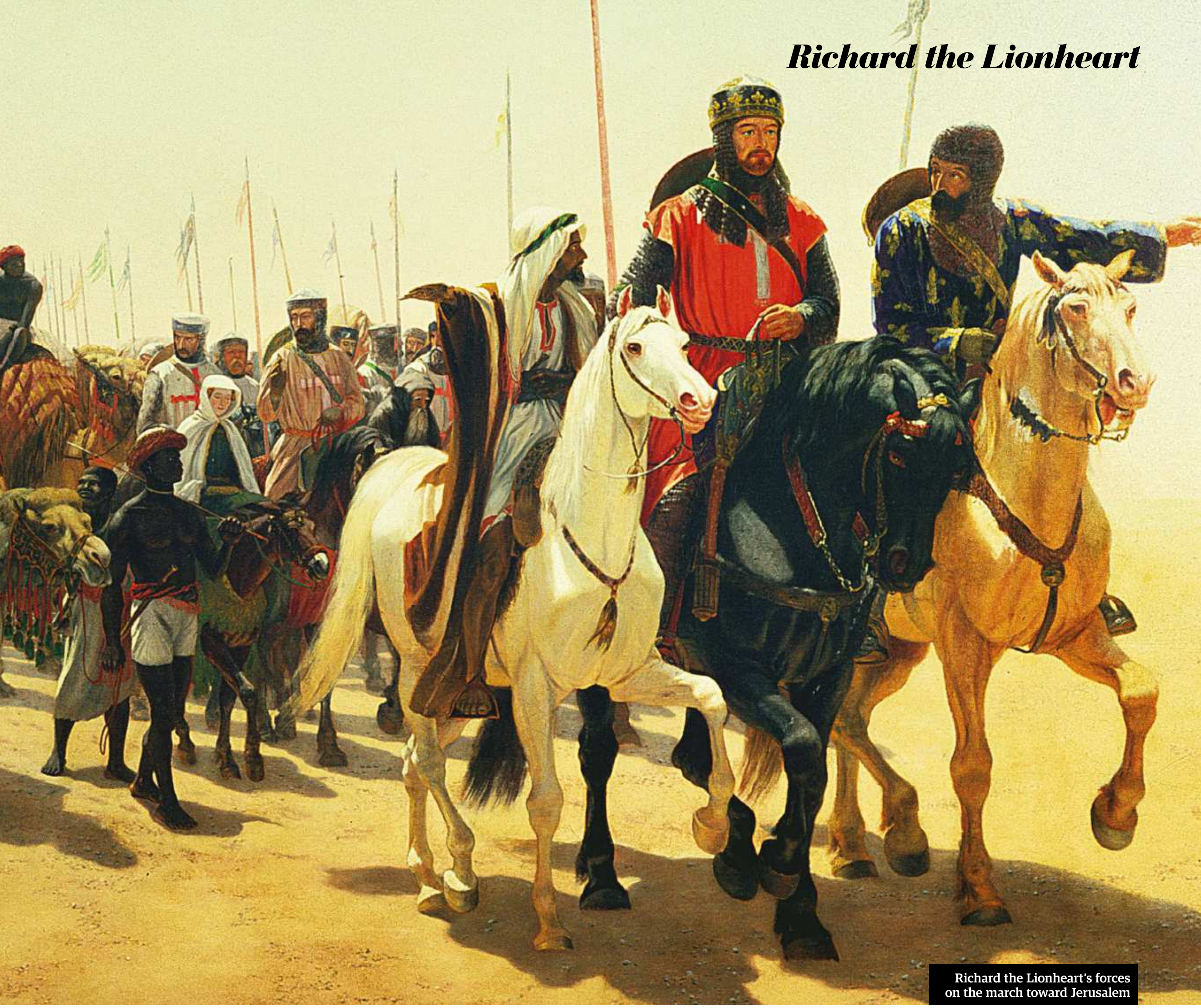
The invading army spent the rest of the winter months in Ascalon before continuing hostilities in the spring of 1192. Saladin, who had been forced by his emirs (commanders) to disband much of what was left of his army - the emirs favouring consolidation rather than open hostilities - launched no major attack. However, bands of Saracen troops constantly plagued and harrassed the crusaders, with a series of small fights and skirmishes slowly eroding the crusader army's numbers and morale. This came to a head on 22 May when the fortified town of Darum fell to the crusader forces after five days of bloody fighting. The crusaders had won great battles in the Holy Land but no more of their armies were journeying across the Mediterranean to bolster their forces; those men who had fallen in battle weren't going to be replaced by more men. Richard's crusade was faltering, its primary purpose slipping away like sand in an hourglass.

The crusading king of England managed to marshal his remaining forces together for one last advance on Jerusalem, marching inland in June of that year. This time, far from being checked at Beit Nuba, the crusaders actually came within sight of the hallowed city. The time, it appeared, had finally come. Richard was to return Jesus' city to its rightful owners and reinstate Christianity as the dominant religious and military power in the Holy Land. However, as the tired, dusty and bronzed warriors stood there watching the distant city from afar, once more the poison of dissent started to seep through its leaders' ranks.

Despite standing before the city, months of resentment over the course the Crusade had taken boiled over among the military commanders, with debate over the best military course of action descending into personal attacks and squabbles. The majority of the leaders, including Richard, believed the best way to take Jerusalem was not besiege it but to attack Saladin directly in Egypt, thereby forcing him to relinquish it of his own free will as a bargaining chip to prevent his own fall. However, the leader of the surviving French crusaders, the Duke of Burgundy, Hugh III, believed the only course of action was an immediate and direct assault on the city. News of the split in the leaders' plans filtered down to the crusaders themselves, with the knights and soldiers now breaking previous allegiances and siding with one side or the other, splitting the crusader army in two.

Neither of the two forces were now powerful enough to assault a city, let alone Jerusalem, and as such Richard was forced to order a retreat. While progressing back toward the coast, angry with the French, Richard decided to return to England. However, just as he was approaching Jaffa, news arrived via a scout that the city had fallen to Saladin, who had personally overseen the assault. Furthermore, the scout reported that the lives of all the people there were under a very real threat as the Muslim ruler had lost control of his army, the thousands of Muslim soldiers driven berserk due to the massacre at Acre.

With the lives of the surviving crusaders very firmly in his hands - after all, it had been Richard who ordered the Acre executions - a return to England would have to wait. With a band of around 2,000 surviving knights and soldiers, Richard then launched one final assault on Saladin, approaching Jaffa by the sea in a surprise attack. The Ayyubid soldiers who had only just taken the city, were completely unprepared for the attack and



Richard the Lionheart's forces on the march toward Jerusalem

were soon overrun by Richard's soldiers, with a combination of knights and crusader crossbowmen decisively breaking their resistance. The attack was so brutally effective that Saladin was forced to flee from Jaffa to the south.

This would be the final battle of the Crusade for Saladin and Richard. Following Jaffa's second fall, the region entered a limbo-like stasis, with the Christian crusaders and Muslim Ayyubids sapped of any further willpower for bloodshed. The fighting had gone on for three years and large parts of the historic area lay in ruins. Tens of thousands of men, women and children had lost their lives and, despite some areas of the Levant changing hands, nothing had really changed. Jerusalem remained under Muslim control, Saladin was ruler of the Ayyubid Empire and Richard the Lionheart was still the fierce warrior king with a renowned reputation in Europe but without a firm foothold in the Holy Land. What had changed, though, was Saladin and Richard's desire for more war and bloodshed, and so a treaty soon followed. Jerusalem would remain under Muslim control but from now on, Christian pilgrims and traders would be permitted to visit the city, with their rights protected by law.

For Richard, the treaty was to be his last act in the Holy Land and the final curtain for the Third Crusade, with the king setting out on his return to England immediately after. His return journey, though, would not be as straightforward as the one he had made out there, with a series of events leading to his own capture, temporary imprisonment and yet more battles. However, the war he would go down in history for was his quest for the Holy Land – a journey full of bloodshed, plunder and religious fanaticism, but little territorial success. It ensured his legacy would forever be debated between those who see him as a crusading Christian king and others who view him as an amoral, cold-blooded killer, a debate that still rages on today.

Why was Jerusalem so sought after?

The geographical region of Palestine, between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, was referred to as the Holy Land by Christians and Muslims alike. Both religions claimed ownership due to an association with their faith, with the city of Jerusalem held in particular esteem. Both Islam and Christianity were Abrahamic monotheistic religions and as such, both sides considered the other to be unbelievers in the one true god and considered their presence heretical.

By the Third Crusade, Jerusalem and large parts of Palestine and the Levant region had changed hands again and again, with conflicts destabilising the region. Richard, coming from the Christian West, therefore perceived the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin's forces in 1187 as a direct attack on his faith. From Saladain's point of view he was merely taking back the spiritual heartland of his own faith; one that had previously rested in the hands of infidels.

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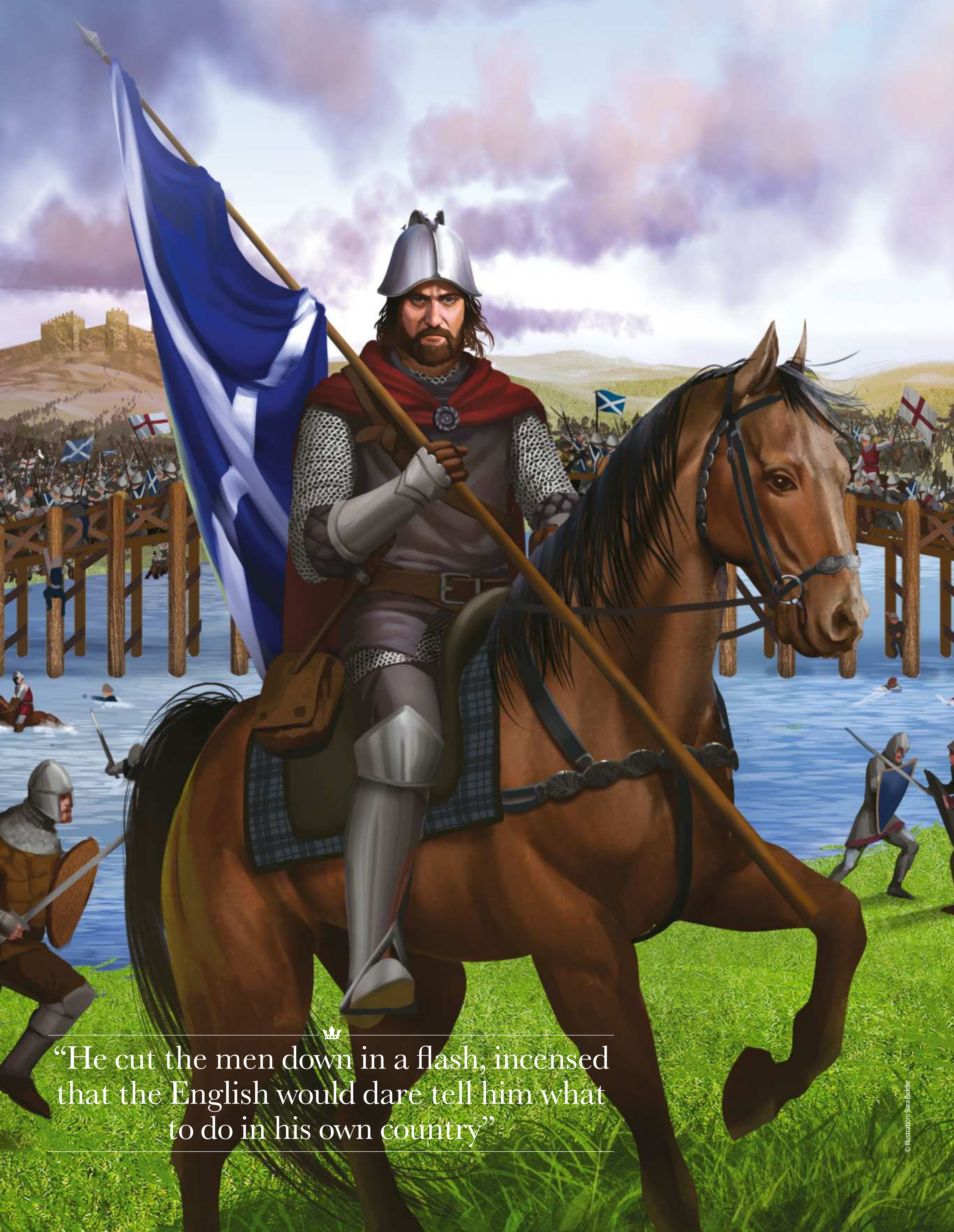


“He cut the men down in a flash, incensed that the English would dare tell him what to do in his own country”

© Illustration: Sara Biddle

William Wallace

Braveheart's Scottish rebellion against the English and their repressive king Edward I had its finest hour in a bloody battle on the outskirts of Stirling

William Wallace strode confidently among his troops. Thousands of men were lined up on high ground close to the Augustinian monastery of Cambuskenneth Abbey near Stirling. They stood still, looking down at the English army that had gathered not a mile away, studying them carefully. Every so often there would be a rousing cheer and a defiant chant. Wallace would give them sparks of energy, explain what he expected of them and get them excited. This would be their moment of glory, he told them. This was a chance to help bring Scotland back into the hands of the Scots.

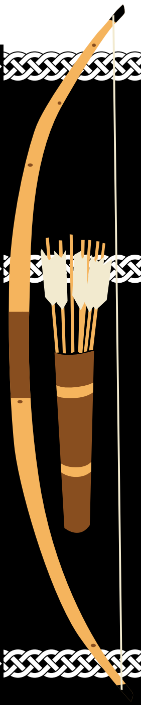
It was just before dawn on 11 September 1297. Despite a slight breeze and a morning chill, things were about to warm up considerably. Only a few days earlier the Scottish force had been laying siege to Dundee Castle, which the English held thanks to their victory at Dunbar the previous year. However, when news reached Wallace that the English army was heading to Scotland on the order of English King Edward I, Wallace called off the siege and then led his men south to meet their oldest and fiercest enemy.

The English didn't have the element of surprise, but they looked impressive enough. Wallace watched them as they gathered south of the river, noting the many English banners fluttering in the breeze. The knights were sitting on the backs of large warhorses in their full regalia. His own troops were mostly infantry armed with long spears and they looked decidedly less professional. On paper, the English were the stronger side. Led by John de Warenne, Earl of Surrey, and Hugh de Cressingham, the English treasurer of Scotland, they were well versed in battle, a fighting machine that had recently crushed the Welsh in battle.

The Scots were far less experienced, raised on the basis of Scottish service and effectively men from the horseless classes forming a common army. The English thought them to be of lesser class, disorganised and weak, but they had one thing in spades: righteous anger. Handled well, Wallace believed they could win any battle and, as an experienced guerrilla campaigner, he hadn't come to face the English unprepared.

But who was William Wallace and just how did he come to jointly command one of the Scottish armies against the English? Some of our knowledge of the man comes from the writings of a storyteller called Blind Harry. He tells of a landowner's son who was educated, able to read and write in Latin and French and who was training to become a priest. Around the end of the 14th century, Walter Bower described Wallace as, "a tall man with the body of a giant, cheerful in appearance with agreeable features, broad-shouldered and big-boned [...] pleasing in appearance but with a wild look, broad in the hips, with strong arms and legs, a most spirited fighting-man, with all his limbs very strong and firm."

Weapons used to inflict death and destruction

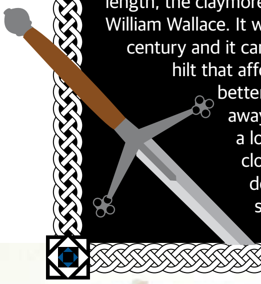


Bow and arrow

Although the Iron Age had made swords cheap, the bow was popular for its accuracy and range. The Welsh had proved themselves adept at using them but the user needed space to operate. As it proved at the Battle of Stirling Bridge, the cramped conditions north of the river and the aggressive nature of the Scots' attack gave little opportunity to use them, but they could be devastating.

Battle-axe

The battle-axe was designed for one-handed combat, although some required the use of two hands. Although they were not as popular in the 13th century, they were nonetheless used. They would struggle to hack through steel-plate armour, but their weight and sharpness would make light work of most enemies. The Scots would also have had axes and indeed used them to great effect on the English troops they felled in Stirling.

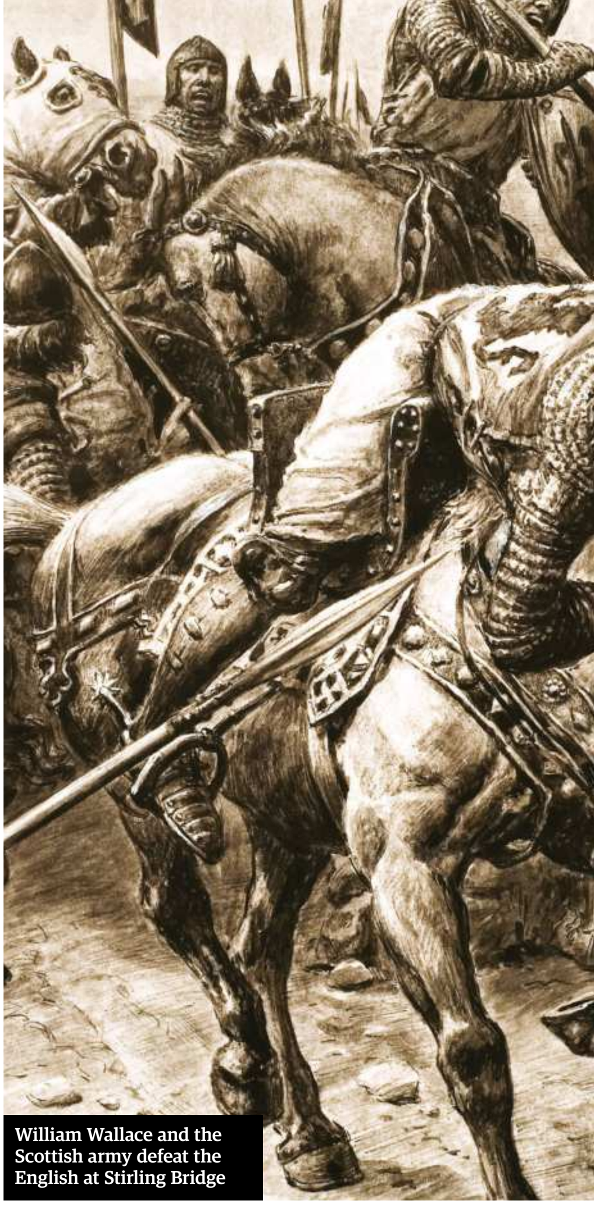


Claymore

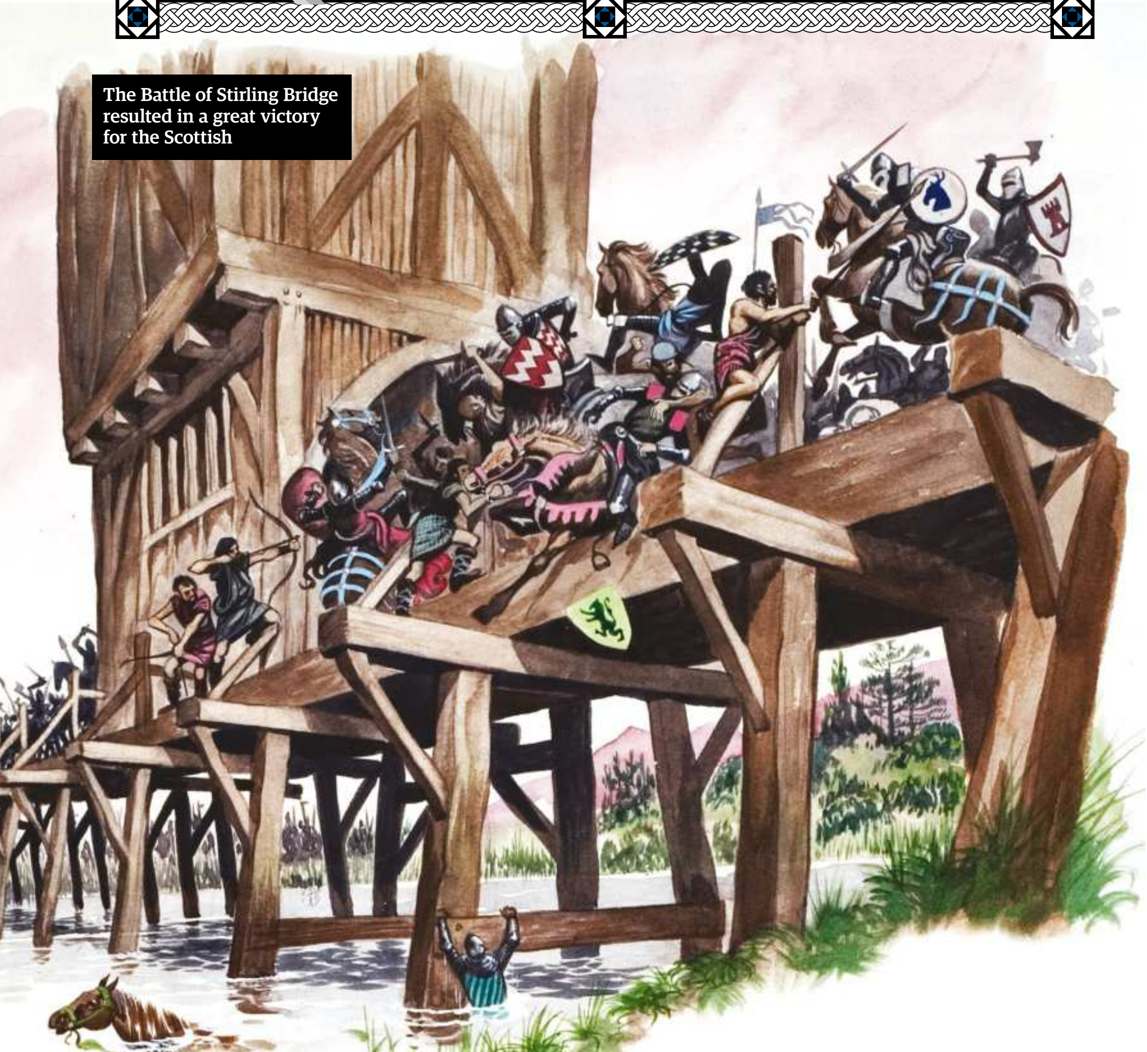
Measuring up to 152 centimetres (60 inches) in length, the claymore was a sword favoured by William Wallace. It was first used in the 13th century and it came with a twisted wooden hilt that afforded a good grip. It was better if the enemy was further away due to its size, but it had a long ricasso so, if an enemy got close, the user could grip further down the sword and stab at shorter range.

Dirk

A long thrusting dagger, the dirk was used by officers in the Scottish Highland regiments and it was prominent in the 13th century. It is thought William Heselrig, the English sheriff or Lanark, was killed by a dirk and that Wallace killed the leader of a group of English youths using one when he was 19. The dirk would double up as a utility tool and it was worn on a Scotsman's kilt.



William Wallace and the Scottish army defeat the English at Stirling Bridge

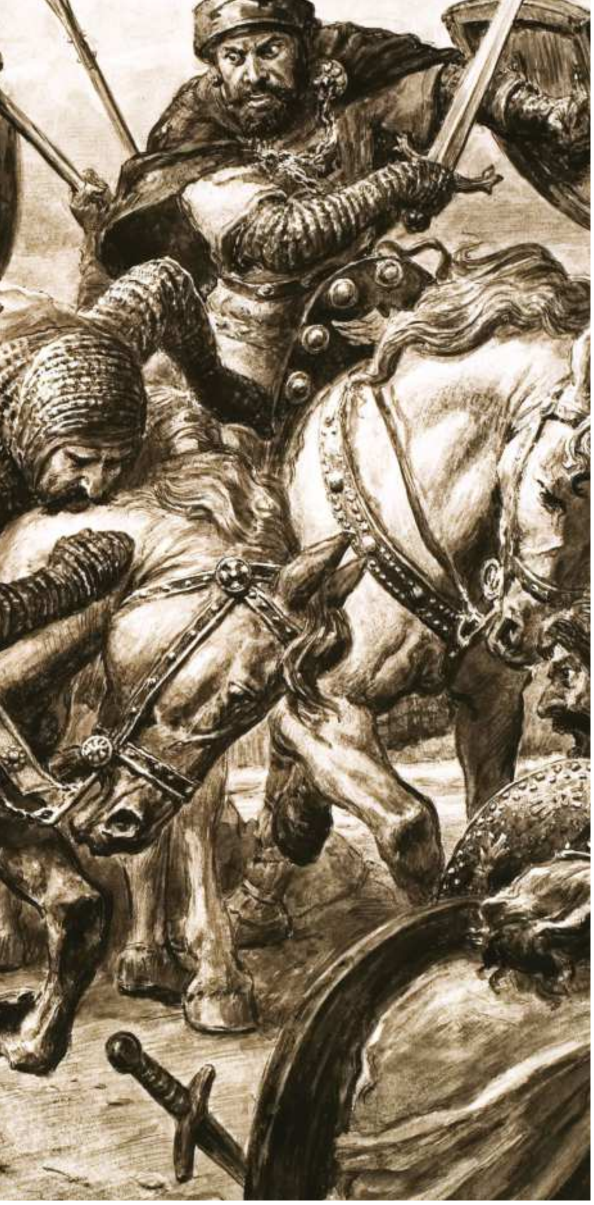


The Battle of Stirling Bridge resulted in a great victory for the Scottish

Sparked by the appointment of John Balliol as King of the Scots in 1292 on the choosing of King Edward I of England, Scotland had effectively come to be ruled by England, ending 100 years of relative peace between the two countries. Balliol had eventually attempted to rebel against this control, siding Scotland with France when Edward wanted to go to war with the French. Balliol made an unsuccessful attempt at attacking Cumberland that saw the English sack Berwick in retaliation. In the middle of all of this carnage, Wallace's anger was growing more and more intense.

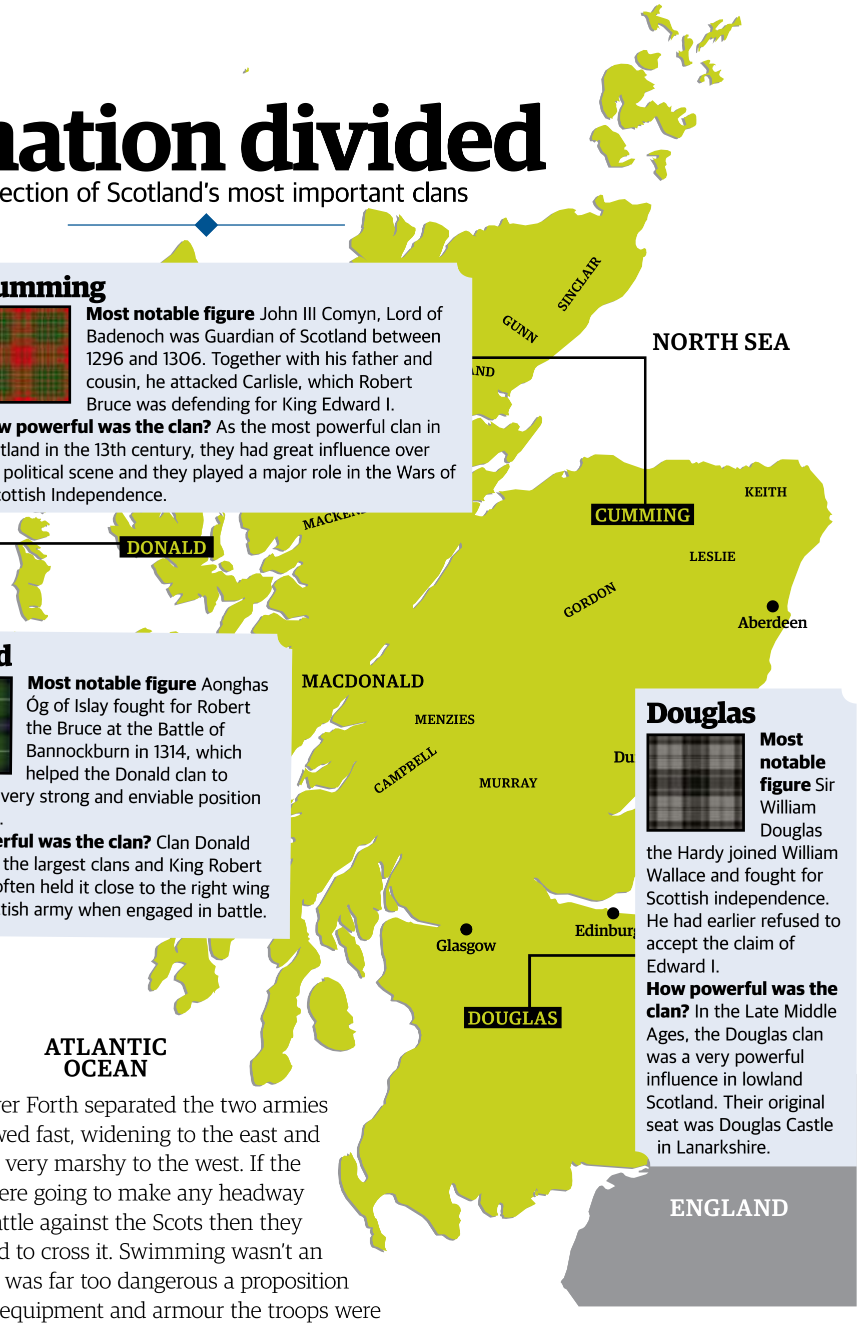
Legend has it that a flash point occurred when he was approached by a group of English soldiers demanding the fish he had caught from a local Scottish river. Wallace offered them half in an attempt at appeasement, but the soldiers refused the offer and the rage in this great bear of a man boiled over. He cut the men down in a flash, incensed that the English would dare tell him what to do in his own country.

The biggest turning point, though, and the one which had led to Wallace jointly leading an army with Andrew Moray, came in the summer of 1297. Wallace and his men were in Lanark and became involved in a skirmish with English soldiers. Although Wallace maimed one of them, they decided to flee. Some historians believe that when the English sheriff of Lanark



A nation divided

A selection of Scotland's most important clans



Cumming

Most notable figure John III Comyn, Lord of Badenoch was Guardian of Scotland between 1296 and 1306. Together with his father and cousin, he attacked Carlisle, which Robert Bruce was defending for King Edward I.

How powerful was the clan? As the most powerful clan in Scotland in the 13th century, they had great influence over the political scene and they played a major role in the Wars of Scottish Independence.

Donald

Most notable figure Aonghas Óg of Islay fought for Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, which helped the Donald clan to cement its very strong and enviable position in Scotland.

How powerful was the clan? Clan Donald was one of the largest clans and King Robert the Bruce often held it close to the right wing of the Scottish army when engaged in battle.

Douglas

Most notable figure Sir William Douglas the Hardy joined William Wallace and fought for Scottish independence. He had earlier refused to accept the claim of Edward I.

How powerful was the clan? In the Late Middle Ages, the Douglas clan was a very powerful influence in lowland Scotland. Their original seat was Douglas Castle in Lanarkshire.

William Heselrig found out, he sought revenge on Wallace's wife, Mirren Braidfute, ordering her to be raped and executed. Wallace is said to have visited Heselrig late at night and split his skull in half. By killing one of Scotland's most high-profile rulers, Wallace became viewed as a courageous man who wasn't afraid to fight.

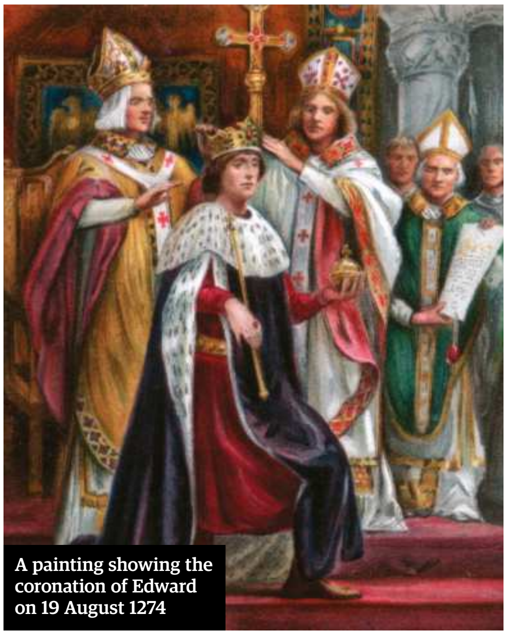
These actions eventually led the son of a county knight to become the figurehead of a nation's battle for independence, waiting with his army on a hill in the cold Scottish autumn of 1297 for battle. Full of ambition and bristling with built-up hate, his forces were boosted when Andrew De Moray and his troops joined him. De Moray was an esquire who had led a rebellion against the English in the highlands and northeast Scotland. De Moray had captured a number of Scottish towns, including Elgin and Inverness, and together they formulated a plan. They would wait, patiently sit out the English manoeuvres and then strike when the moment was right.

The River Forth separated the two armies and it flowed fast, widening to the east and becoming very marshy to the west. If the English were going to make any headway in their battle against the Scots then they simply had to cross it. Swimming wasn't an option - it was far too dangerous a proposition given the equipment and armour the troops were carrying. The best way, the consensus suggested, was to use a narrow, wooden bridge close by.

The Earl of Surrey was not convinced. Stirling Bridge would only allow men to cross in small numbers and it was wide enough for just two horses side-by-side. Once they got across this bridge they would then be in boggy conditions with the Scots on high ground.

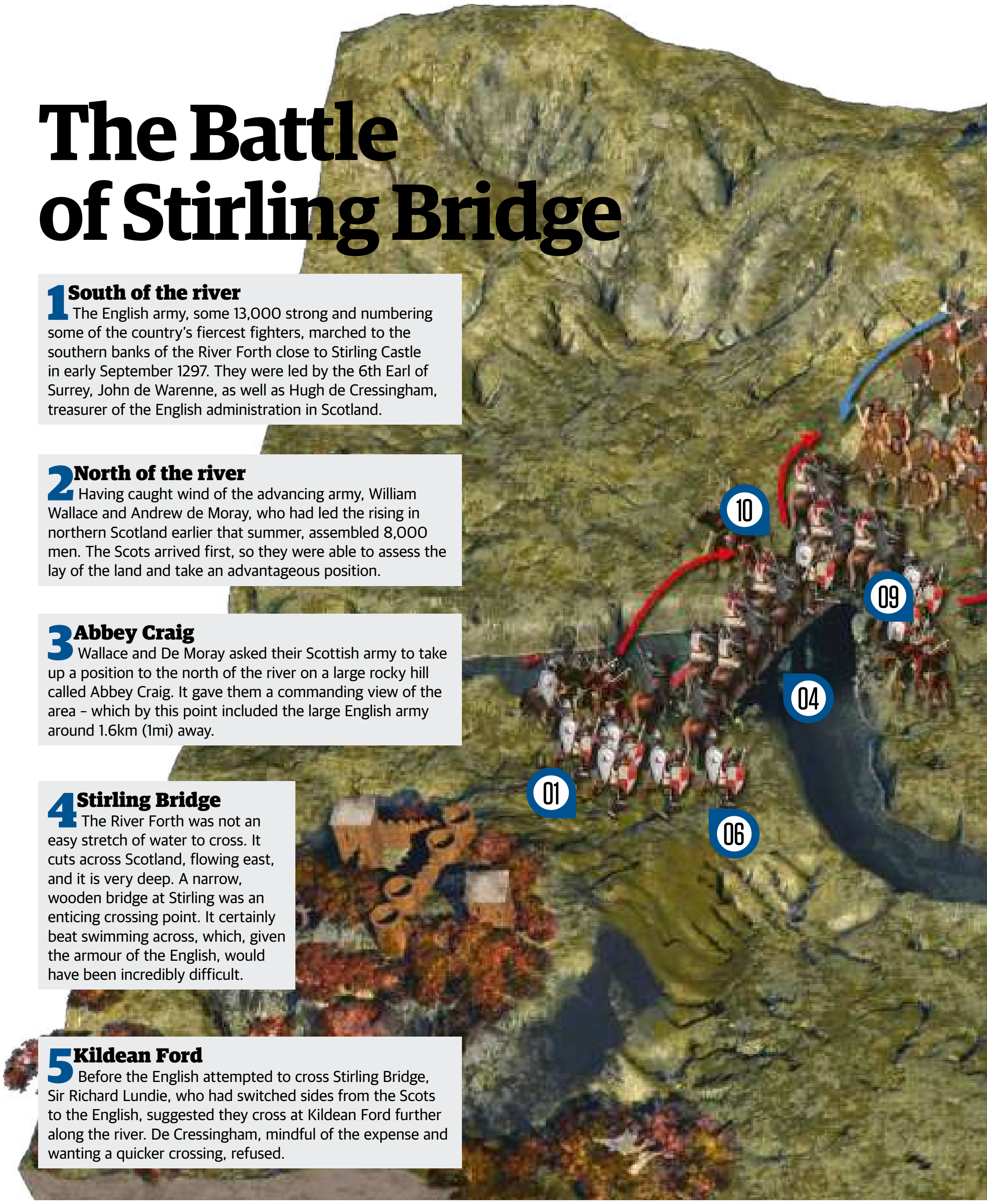
Realising the situation wasn't favourable, Surrey agreed to mediate a truce and so sent Malcolm Earl of Lennox and his relative James Stewart. They came back empty-handed - Wallace believed the advantage was with the Scottish and he was there to fight, not talk.

> "Wallace would not order his men to charge until an ideal number of English had crossed"



A painting showing the coronation of Edward on 19 August 1274

The Battle of Stirling Bridge



1 South of the river

The English army, some 13,000 strong and numbering some of the country's fiercest fighters, marched to the southern banks of the River Forth close to Stirling Castle in early September 1297. They were led by the 6th Earl of Surrey, John de Warenne, as well as Hugh de Cressingham, treasurer of the English administration in Scotland.

2 North of the river

Having caught wind of the advancing army, William Wallace and Andrew de Moray, who had led the rising in northern Scotland earlier that summer, assembled 8,000 men. The Scots arrived first, so they were able to assess the lay of the land and take an advantageous position.

3 Abbey Craig

Wallace and De Moray asked their Scottish army to take up a position to the north of the river on a large rocky hill called Abbey Craig. It gave them a commanding view of the area – which by this point included the large English army around 1.6km (1mi) away.

4 Stirling Bridge

The River Forth was not an easy stretch of water to cross. It cuts across Scotland, flowing east, and it is very deep. A narrow, wooden bridge at Stirling was an enticing crossing point. It certainly beat swimming across, which, given the armour of the English, would have been incredibly difficult.

5 Kildean Ford

Before the English attempted to cross Stirling Bridge, Sir Richard Lundie, who had switched sides from the Scots to the English, suggested they cross at Kildean Ford further along the river. De Cressingham, mindful of the expense and wanting a quicker crossing, refused.

The situation for the English was far from ideal, but De Cressingham still argued they should push on and convinced Surrey. At the break of dawn on 11 September, the English and Welsh infantry began to cross the bridge. Wallace saw this and spoke to his troops again, ensuring they were ready for a brutal confrontation. The Scottish troops would meet the English head-on through the middle. De Moray's soldiers would go down the flanks. For now, though, it was a game of patience – Wallace would not order his men to charge until an ideal number of English had crossed.

While all this went on Surrey was – incredibly – sound asleep in his tent. By the time he finally awoke, hundreds of troops had made their way across. In farcical scenes, Wallace watched bemused as Surrey ordered the troops back over the bridge to the south of the river once more. It showed a dismissive attitude to the Scots – it meant Surrey cared little about the embarrassing, disorganised appearance this would display to the opposition. The English, his actions said, would win no matter what time he ordered his troops over.

As Wallace stood on high ground, able to see everything around him, he could see the trap that the English would be walking into and knew they were overconfident. Once they got over the river, they would have to gather on a confined narrow loop. The English soldiers would be naturally surrounded on three sides by water and the only possible ways out of that were either into the river, back across the bridge

English

NUMBER OF TROOPS:

13,000

LEADER

JOHN DE WARENNE

The 6th Earl of Surrey had defeated the Scots a year earlier in the Battle of Dunbar and he was accompanied in leading the army by Hugh de Cressingham, treasurer of the English administration in Scotland.
Strengths Had fought in many battles, including Edward I's Welsh campaigns during which Wales was captured.
Weaknesses Known for switching sides, he wasn't the most loyal of men.

◆

KEY UNIT

KNIGHTS

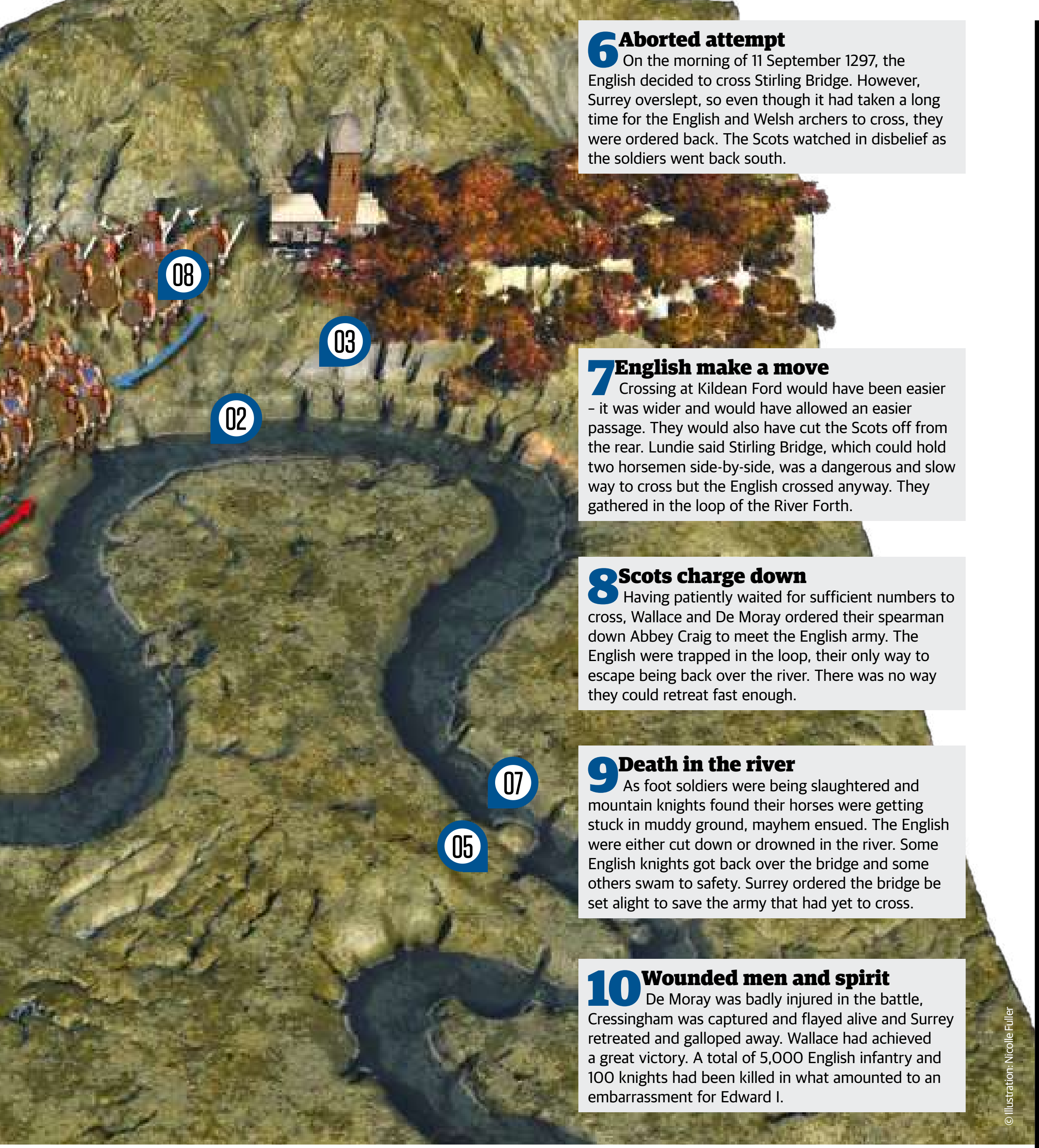
Sitting atop their warhorses in full regalia, the knights were well trained, experienced, ruthless and accustomed to winning.
Strengths Honour and chivalry was important to the knights, themselves professional heavy cavalry soldiers.
Weaknesses In the case of the Battle of Stirling Bridge, the horses made them cumbersome fighters and made crossing the bridge more difficult.

◆

KEY WEAPON

SWORD

The Iron Age had made swords cheaper and changed the way they were made, but they were still a symbol of status and carried by the knights as a sign of their superiority over others.
Strengths Swords proved ideal for cutting, and to get through armour plating or leather, they also came in handy for thrusting.
Weaknesses They were more ideal for close-up fighting. The longbows of the Welsh bowmen were more effective for range.



6 Aborted attempt

On the morning of 11 September 1297, the English decided to cross Stirling Bridge. However, Surrey overslept, so even though it had taken a long time for the English and Welsh archers to cross, they were ordered back. The Scots watched in disbelief as the soldiers went back south.

7 English make a move

Crossing at Kildean Ford would have been easier – it was wider and would have allowed an easier passage. They would also have cut the Scots off from the rear. Lundie said Stirling Bridge, which could hold two horsemen side-by-side, was a dangerous and slow way to cross but the English crossed anyway. They gathered in the loop of the River Forth.

8 Scots charge down

Having patiently waited for sufficient numbers to cross, Wallace and De Moray ordered their spearman down Abbey Craig to meet the English army. The English were trapped in the loop, their only way to escape being back over the river. There was no way they could retreat fast enough.

9 Death in the river

As foot soldiers were being slaughtered and mountain knights found their horses were getting stuck in muddy ground, mayhem ensued. The English were either cut down or drowned in the river. Some English knights got back over the bridge and some others swam to safety. Surrey ordered the bridge be set alight to save the army that had yet to cross.

10 Wounded men and spirit

De Moray was badly injured in the battle, Cressingham was captured and flayed alive and Surrey retreated and galloped away. Wallace had achieved a great victory. A total of 5,000 English infantry and 100 knights had been killed in what amounted to an embarrassment for Edward I.

© Illustration: Nicolle Fuller

or through any advancing Scots line. Surrey was aware of the danger but De Cressingham and others were insistent. A Council of War was called and, finally, Surrey decided he was ready to attack. The troops were sent back over the bridge and Wallace readied his spearmen who were arranged in groups, each with a specific instruction for the upcoming battle.

The Scottish spearmen made up the bulk of Wallace's army – they were the Scots' answer to the English cavalry. With their 3.7-metre (12-foot) long sharp poles, the spears were a deadly alternative. Held aloft and at full charge, they would have caused many a rivals' mouth to gape open in fearful anticipation.

For a second time, though, there was a delay as Surrey decided to approach Wallace. Recalling his troops, he sent two Dominican friars to see the Scotsman but Wallace's reply was clear: "Tell your commander that we are not here to make peace but to do battle, defend ourselves and liberate our kingdom. Let them come on, and we shall prove this in their very beards."

The English were again having doubts and an alternative crossing was pointed out: a ford further along the river that would not only be quicker to cross but would allow the English to get behind the Scots. De Cressingham ruled this out, though. He was worried that it would take too long to move the soldiers again and that this would incur extra costs for the English king. There was no persuading him otherwise.

The English troops crossed the bridge again and Wallace knew this time they wouldn't turn

Scottish

NUMBER OF TROOPS:

8,000

LEADER

WILLIAM WALLACE

Wallace's stature as a fearless leader rose following his slaying of the English sheriff of Lanark, William Heselrig. Men joined him, striking at Scone, Ancrum and Dundee. He proved to be a good, tactical thinker.

Strengths Unafraid to get stuck in, his beliefs and desire for a free Scotland motivated his army.

Weaknesses Lack of true nobility meant he wasn't universally accepted.

KEY UNIT

SPEARMAN

With the majority of the Scots nobles under lock and key in England, Wallace's army was made up of men from lower society, but they were strong and willing.

Strengths Although seen as peasant amateur fighters, they nevertheless fought well as a unit thanks to the army's tactics.

Weaknesses When up against better-organised opposition, as proved at Falkirk, they were left wanting.

KEY WEAPON

LONG SPEARS

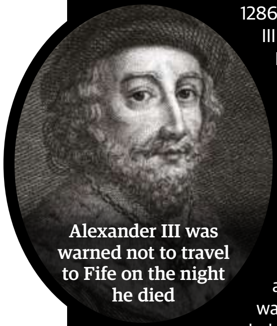
Although the Scots used axes and knives, their 3.7m (12ft) long spears caused the most damage. It was a spear that killed Hugh Cressingham, piercing his armour.

Strengths The length of the spears provided extra distance between the soldier and his victim.

Weaknesses They were very unwieldy whenever they had to be used in close-quarters fighting.

Three reasons for war

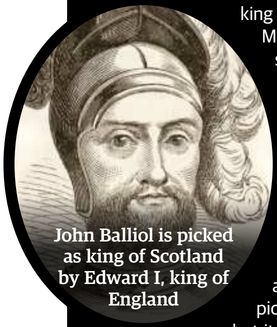
Death of King Alexander III



Alexander III was warned not to travel to Fife on the night he died

Keen to see his second wife on 18 March 1286, the King of Scots Alexander III travelled on horseback from Edinburgh Castle to the royal palace of Kinghorn in Fife. Although he had been warned about the treacherous weather, the king fell from his horse along the way and died, aged 44. Since his three children, Margaret, Alexander and David, were also dead, it left his three-year-old granddaughter Margaret as the sole heir. However, there was a desire by the Scots to be ruled by a king rather than a queen, which prompted a call for King Edward I of England to intervene.

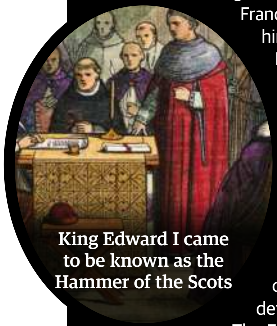
Greater English control



John Balliol is picked as king of Scotland by Edward I, king of England

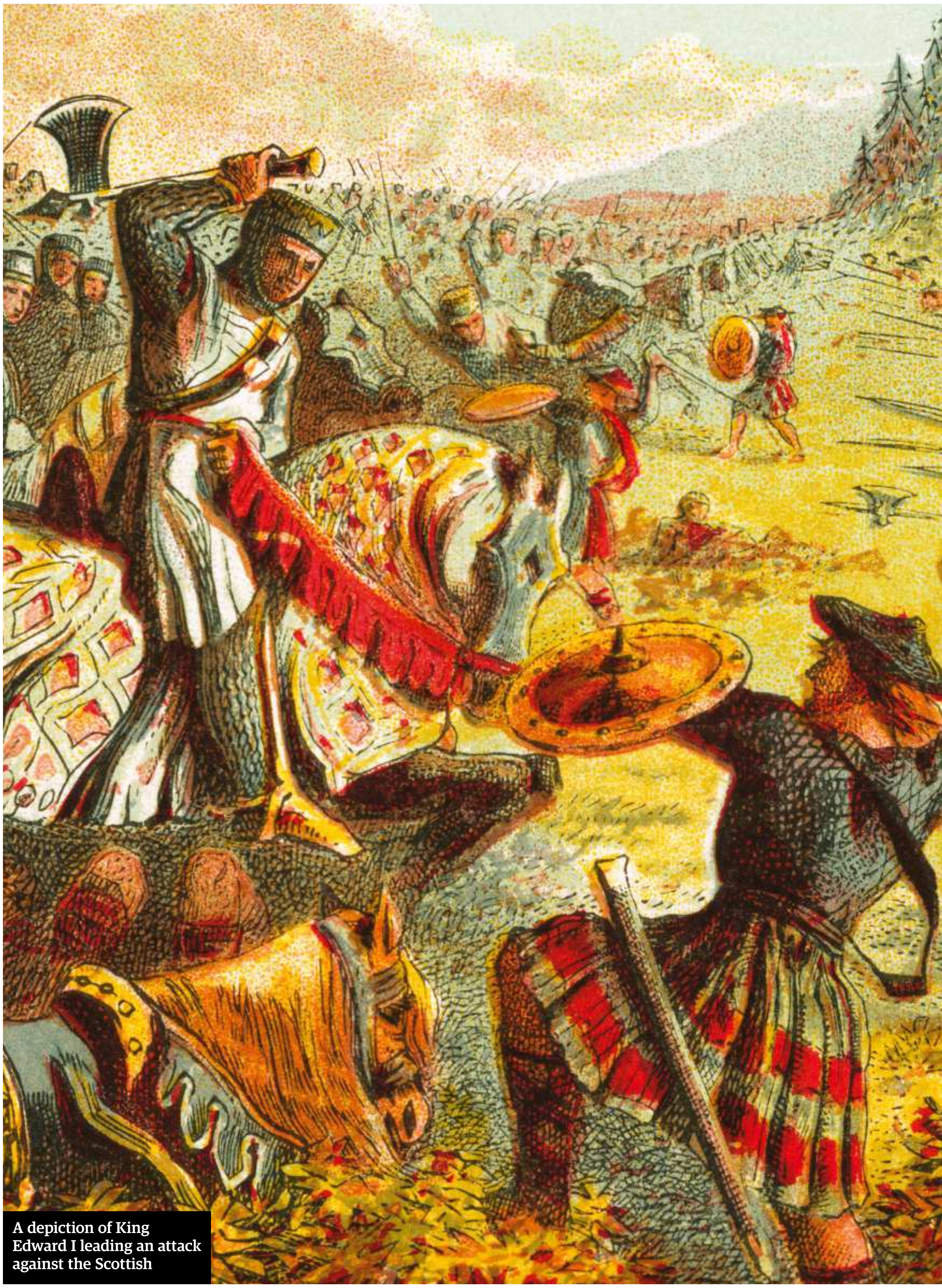
Edward I was asked to help pick a new king for Scotland. He suggested Margaret marry his eldest son, six-year-old Prince Edward, but before this could take place – a move that would have made Prince Edward king – Margaret fell ill and died in 1290. She had not been crowned at this point. Edward I agreed to judge who should be crowned next but, in the process, tightened his grip on Scotland and began to seize assets. He picked nobleman John Balliol as king but it became clear Edward I planed to use him as a puppet.

French-Scottish treaty



King Edward I came to be known as the Hammer of the Scots

King Edward I wanted to go to war with France and he insisted the Scots join him in the battle but in 1295 John Balliol and Philip IV of France signed a treaty instead. If England invaded either Scotland or France, the other agreed to invade England. Edward I saw his grip loosening and in 1296 sent troops to the Scottish border. Balliol's decision to sack Cumberland was met with great force in the then-Scottish town of Berwick, leading to Balliol's defeat and subsequent dethroning. The English army continued to move north to Dunbar where a battle took place. The War of Independence was on.



A depiction of King Edward I leading an attack against the Scottish

Scotland's long journey to Stirling Bridge

Hadrian's Wall
As Roman Emperor Hadrian rules Britain, he decides to build a defence wall to help prevent an invasion from the north. With locally sourced materials, the wall reaches a length of 117.5km (73mi). **122**

Western independence
There are two Gaelic kingdoms called Dairada, one in Ireland and one in Scotland. Dependent on each other, but King Aidan secures Scottish independence for Argyllshire. **575**

Capture of Edinburgh
The Kingdom of Northumbria, formed in 604, decides to capture Edinburgh from Gododdin, a kingdom in the northeast of Britannia. It keeps it for three centuries. **638**

Burning of Iona
Iona, a small island in the Inner Hebrides on the western coast of Scotland, is set alight by the Vikings which had been raiding and trading from the 8th century. **802**

Scottish king
Kenneth MacAlpin I is crowned king and begins the House of Alpin. The crown will alternate between two descendant branches of MacAlpin. **842**

Essential Wallace figures

1,600

In 1296, this number of Scotland's leading nobles swore loyalty to Edward I. Wallace did not.

1300

The year the king of France wrote to his envoys in Rome demanding that they should help Wallace, leading some to believe he had personally visited the French king.

5

The amount of places parts of his dead body were displayed - his head was placed on London Bridge and his limbs were put on show in Perth, Stirling, Berwick and Newcastle.

1297

Wallace was first named in English chronicles in this year, following the murder of the English sheriff of Lanark.

715

The number of villages in the north of England burnt by Wallace and his men following their victory at Stirling Bridge.

back - the battle was now imminent. He urged patience to his men, commanding his troops crouched on the hillside, eager to get going, to rein in their blood lust until enough Englishmen had crossed. Eventually, as the hours ticked by, around 5,400 English and Welsh infantry as well as some cavalry had made their way across the river. Before they could even begin to advance forward in order, though, Wallace gave the word.

The Scots' spearmen charged from their advantageous position on the lower slopes of the Ochil Hills, down toward the unprepared English cavalry. One Scottish group went toward the bridge, cutting it off and preventing more English from crossing. Surrey's hope that his bowmen would be able to take their positions was destroyed since they had yet to get over the bridge. The Scots were nullifying them. Another group of Scots went down the other wing and a large group went into the middle. As the horses were skewered and the knights fell to the ground, the blood began to mix with the cold and clear water in the Scottish river.

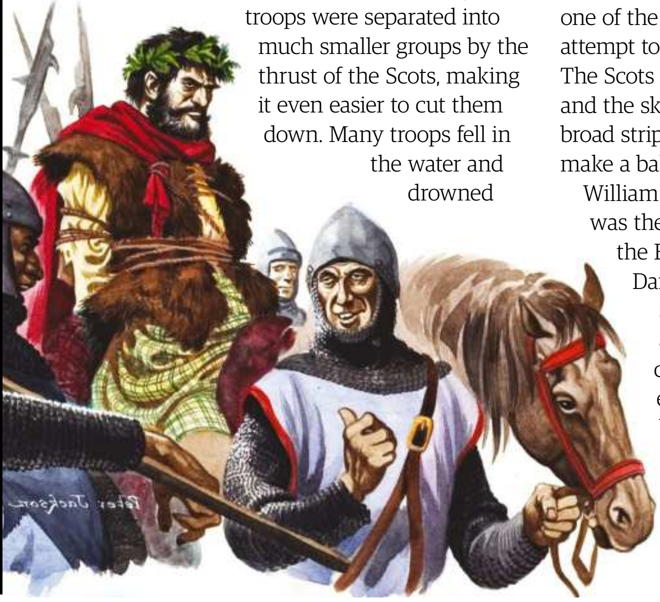
The English were cut to pieces as the Scots raged forward, pushing their rivals back toward the river. The English troops were separated into much smaller groups by the thrust of the Scots, making it even easier to cut them down. Many troops fell in the water and drowned and only a small number managed to swim successfully back to the other side. Sir Marmaduke Tweng was the only knight to escape with his life. Amid the carnage, De Moray, who had been commanding the northern Scots, was seriously wounded, but Wallace was getting stuck in, urging his troops to continue pressing on. It caused panic among the English, who had thought the battle would be a mere formality. Unused to what they saw as savagery by an untrained army, they were trying to retreat as best they could but soon found themselves completely and utterly surrounded.

Surrey, who had not crossed the bridge, was aghast. He ordered the rest of his men, some 5,000 more, to retreat. The bridge was set on fire to prevent the Scots from getting across and inflicting further damage. The battle continued for not much longer than an hour, with screams, shouts, and the clash of metal piercing through the air, the looming presence of Stirling Castle behind them as a reminder that a natural fortress could be just as impenetrable as a man-made one. The remaining Englishmen took flight to Berwick with those lagging behind captured or killed.

Surrey escaped unharmed, but the same couldn't be said of his reputation. De Cressingham had been one of the first to cross north and he fell during his attempt to escape, cut through by a Lochaber axe. The Scots took his body away where it was flayed and the skin cut into small pieces. Wallace took a broad strip of De Cressingham's skin and used it to make a baldrick for his sword.

William Wallace had secured a great victory. It was the first time the Scottish had defeated the English in a significant battle since the Dark Ages. The freedom for which Wallace strived was still a long way off, though, and there would be more battles and challenges to come. As he stood there, exhausted and triumphant on the battlefield, he pushed thoughts of the future out of his mind. For now, he would savour the taste of a victory that once more made a nation dream - and perhaps even believe - that it could achieve freedom once again.

> Wallace is remembered today with a monument that overlooks the city of Stirling in Scotland



Feudal system introduced
David I becomes king and rules until 1153. His reign is referred to as the Davidian Revolution because he founds burghs, monasteries, feudalism and the Normanisation of the Scottish government. **1124**

Allegiance to England
The Treaty of Falaise is signed by the captive Scottish King William I and King Henry II. It states that Scotland is to be subordinate to the English crown. **1174**

Treaty of York
Alexander II of Scotland and Henry II of England set new boundaries for Scotland. Scotland ceases claiming hereditary rights to Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland. **1237**

Treaty of Perth
An agreement between Scotland and Norway ends conflict and recognises Scottish sovereignty over the Hebrides and the Isle of Man. Norway is given sovereignty over Shetland and Orkney. **1266**

Claims of independence
The Scottish Wars of Independence are sparked thanks to numerous factors, not least the granting of the Scottish throne to John Balliol. It leads to the rise of William Wallace. **1292**

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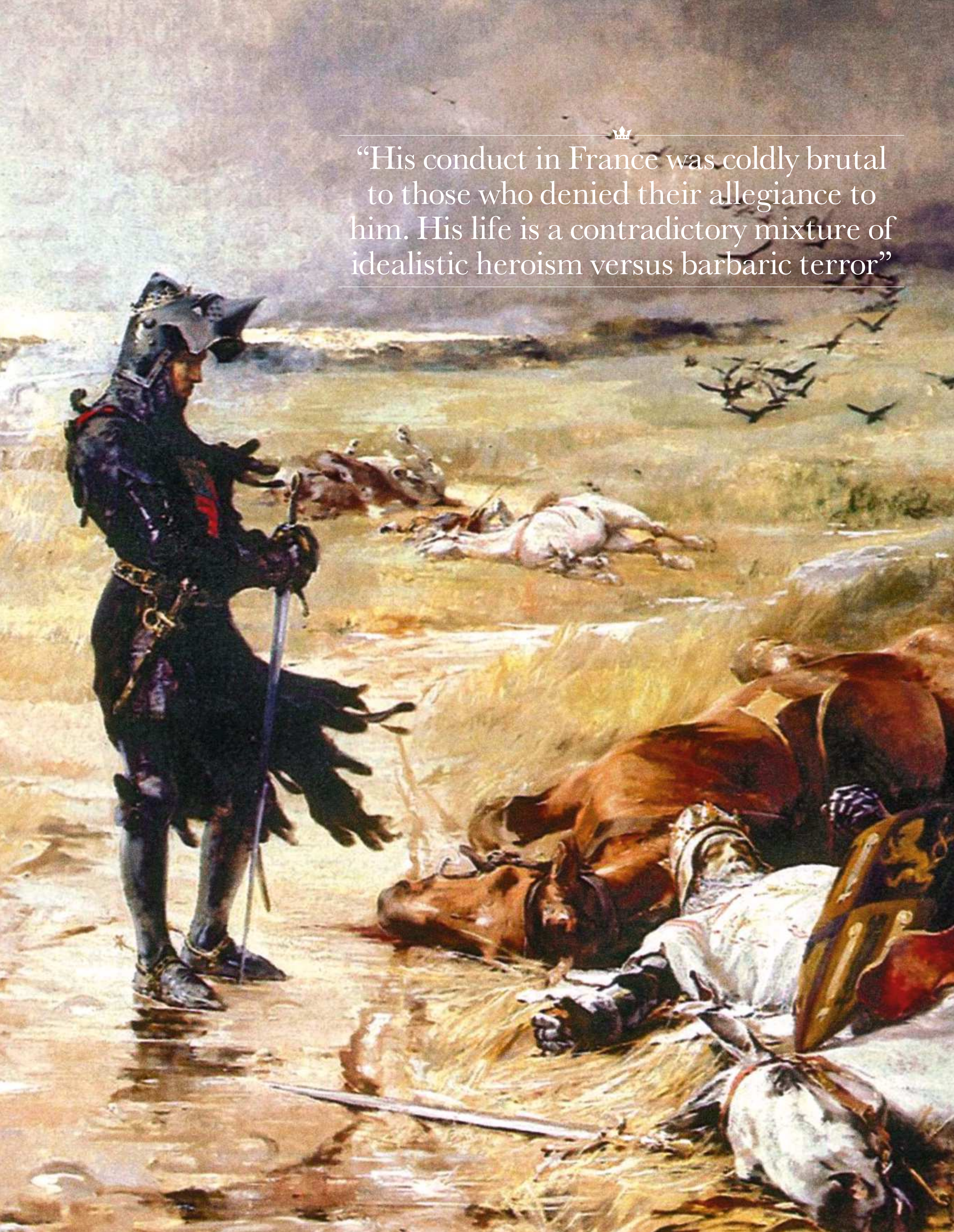


> “His conduct in France was coldly brutal to those who denied their allegiance to him. His life is a contradictory mixture of idealistic heroism versus barbaric terror”

Edward the Black Prince

Known to history as 'The Black Prince', the eldest son of Edward III was a renowned military commander with a reputation for chivalry, as well as a penchant for mass destruction and calculated violence

On the evening of 19 September 1356, the heir to the throne of the England entertained the King of France in his tent, near the town of Poitiers in western France. However, this was no ordinary royal meeting. The king had been captured on the field of battle and was at the mercy of one of the most legendary figures in medieval history. Although he was only in his mid-twenties, Edward, Prince of Wales, was at the pinnacle of his military career. His life personally symbolises the first half of the Hundred Years' War, when England fought for the right to wear the French crown.

The English rammed and boarded Castilian ships, before the crews clashed on the decks

Edward, along with his father and namesake Edward III, epitomises the martial glory of the initial English victories and gained a reputation for courage and chivalry. However, Edward is known to history as 'The Black Prince', and, in many ways, his conduct in France was coldly brutal to those who denied their allegiance to him. His life was a contradictory mixture of idealistic heroism versus barbaric terror.

Born in 1330, Edward was brought up to be a soldier. In the medieval world the ideal king had to be a warrior and Edward III wanted his son to be in military training from an early age. At the age of seven, Edward had already been equipped with a complete suit of armour and in the same year the conflict that would become known as the Hundred Years' War began. Prince Edward would spend the rest of his life vigorously, and sometimes controversially, fighting his father's cause and his military career began in earnest at the age of 16.

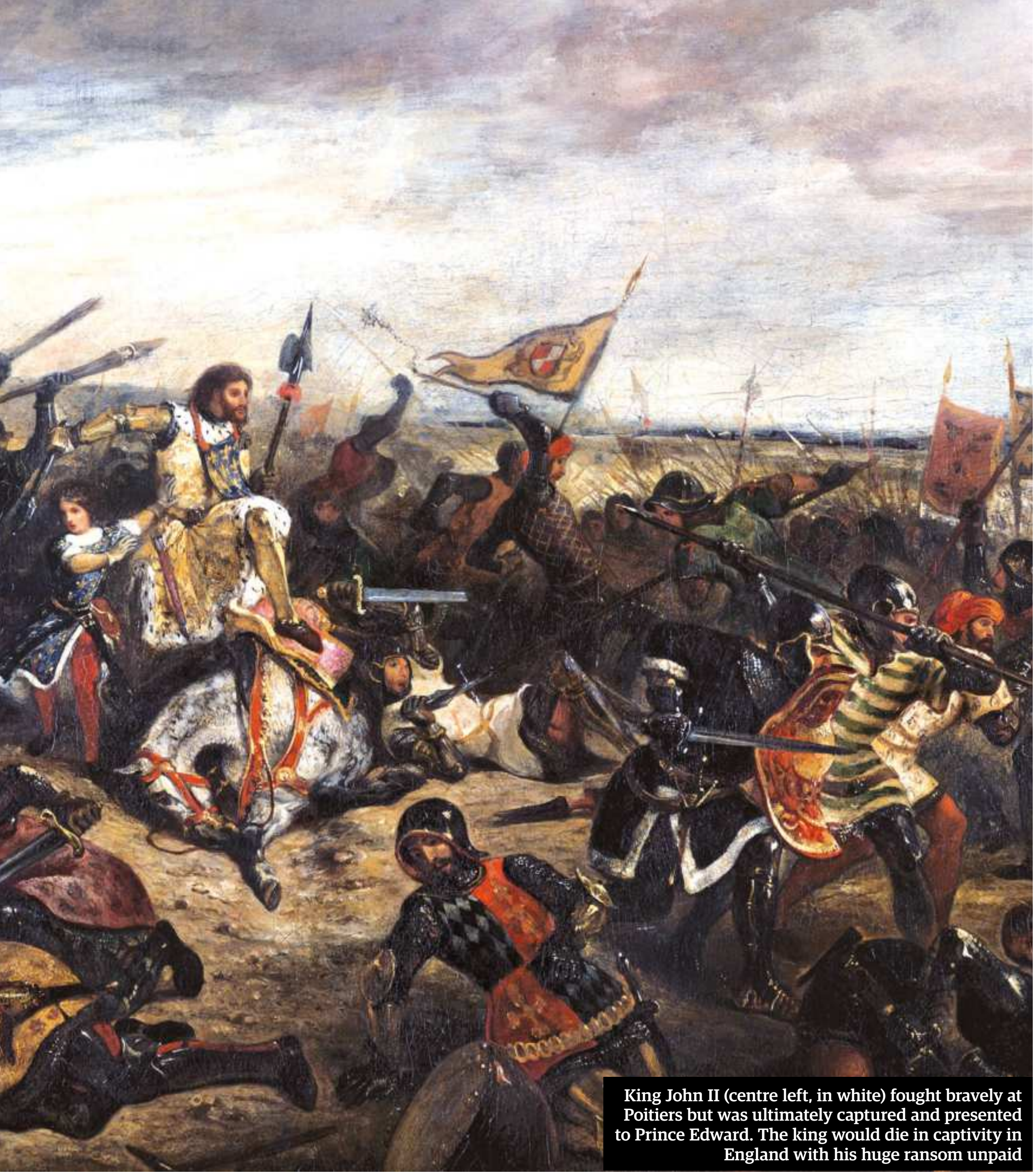
Winning his spurs

In July 1346, Edward III's army landed unopposed in France at La Hogue. The following day the king knighted Prince Edward to mark the beginning of his career as a soldier. The prince immediately exercised his rights to create other knights and in the subsequent march across Normandy the vanguard was nominally under his command. The French caught up with the English on the north bank of the River Somme and Edward III selected a site near the village of Crécy in order to give battle.

The English numbered between 9-12,000 men but were fighting a French army of about 30,000 under King Philip VI. Edward III deployed his men in defensive order on a hill with archers and two divisions in the front, and the king's division forming the reserve. Prince Edward was in the centre of his men, surrounded by his household knights and two earls. Although the French and Genoese soldiers were continually harassed by English longbows, the brunt of the hand-to-hand fighting fell on Prince Edward's men.

Young Edward was in the thick of the fighting from the outset, and many stories are now attached to his conduct. It was reported that the Duke of Alençon, who led the first French charge, beat down the prince's standard before he was killed.

A second French charge penetrated into Edward's division and the prince was in



King John II (centre left, in white) fought bravely at Poitiers but was ultimately captured and presented to Prince Edward. The king would die in captivity in England with his huge ransom unpaid

> "When Edward III eventually sent 20 knights to rescue his son, he found the prince and his men resting and leaning on their swords, having repulsed the French attack"

considerable personal danger, with some saying that he was forced to his knees and captured by the Count of Hainault before being rescued by his standard-bearer Sir Richard Fitz-Simon. In what would normally have been a serious breach of discipline, Fitz-Simon had to lower his banner in order to defend the prince.

One of the most famous stories concerns the messenger sent to Edward III at the moment of crisis to request help for the prince. The king reputedly replied, "Let the boy win his spurs." When Edward III eventually sent 20 knights to rescue his son, he found the prince and his men resting and leaning on their swords, having repulsed the French attack.

Prince Edward's courage during his first major engagement at the Battle of Crécy impressed his contemporaries. According to legend, he honoured the memory of the slain, blind King John of Bohemia by adopting his personal badge of three feathers as his own, which is still the symbol of the Prince of Wales today. There was, however, a contrasting response to the knightly bravura. According to a Hainault chronicler, when Edward III asked his son what he thought of going into battle it is reported that the prince, "said nothing and was ashamed". If this account were true, then it would be at odds with Edward's later behaviour.

Clash on the waves

After Crécy, the French signed a truce with the English that was prolonged by the outbreak of the deadly Black Death. By the summer of 1350 the war was resumed. English plans for an Anglo-Castilian marriage alliance involving Edward's sister Joan fell apart when she died of the plague. The French seized this opportunity to encourage the Castilians to send a large fleet to harass shipping in the English Channel.

By July 1350 the English had assembled a fleet at Sandwich and in mid-August a Castilian host was off Winchelsea. Both Prince Edward and his father embarked on 28 August and on the next evening the two fleets engaged. The English rammed and boarded Castilian ships, before the crews clashed on the decks. In the fray, the king's ship was sunk and Edward III had to scramble aboard a Castilian ship. Similarly, Prince Edward's ship was sinking when his brother John sailed alongside and rescued him. The battle was a fierce contest, but ended with the retreat of the Castilians at twilight, with the remainder being captured by the English.

Afterwards the king and his sons anchored at Winchelsea and Rye and conscripted horses from the towns to convey the news to Queen Philippa. It is recorded the royal family spent the night revelling and recounting tales of the day's fighting, which appears to be a coldly decadent contrast to the maritime slaughter that had taken place only hours before. Edward III made much of his naval victory and the new coinage of 1351 reflected his claim to be the 'King of the Sea' with the martial monarch shown to be standing in a ship. As for Prince Edward, the fight at Winchelsea only served to enhance his warrior reputation, which would increase in the years ahead. His career would also begin to be tainted by an increasing harshness in his conduct of the war in France.

Le terrible Prince Noir

Final truces with France ended in the mid-1350s and Prince Edward was granted his own theatre of operations in Gascony, which at that time was an English possession. The prince was enthusiastic and wrote that he, "prayed the king to grant him leave to be the first to pass beyond the sea." He formally sailed to southwest France with full powers to administer English territories there. He also received a military contract of service, which made provisions for events such as the capture of 'the head of the war' (i.e. the main French commander) and the prince's own possible capture.

Edward landed at Bordeaux on 20 September 1355, and his combined Anglo-Gascon army of 6-8,000 men set out on 5 October with the aim of conducting a 'chevauchée' - a raid designed to weaken the enemy's supplies and prestige by deliberately burning and pillaging towns and villages. It was effectively a form of authorised terrorism, and was used throughout the Hundred Years' War, with Edward helping to legitimise this wanton destruction.

Prince Edward took part in the naval Battle of Winchelsea in 1350. The English victory encouraged Edward III to issue new coinage in 1351 depicting him as 'King of the Sea'

The Prince's target in 1355 was the lands of Jean d'Armagnac who had been appointed by John II of France to put pressure on English territories. Once his army reached enemy lands on 10 October, it moved into three columns and spread out to live off the land and a fortnight was spent ravaging d'Armagnac lands. The army even had portable bridges to increase the range of the pillaging. Edward then moved into Languedoc and was able to inflict considerable damage on local towns, including the town of Carcassonne, which he seized and burned.

By 8 November he had reached the furthest point of his march at Narbonne on the Mediterranean shore where the town was taken despite fierce resistance - but its castle held out. Edward returned to friendly territory on 27 November, having not once engaged the French in open battle. The French had deliberately avoided him, making them appear hesitant and thereby giving the prince a propaganda victory.

The chevauchée was a nightmare for the people of southern France. At Montisgard it was recorded that men, women and children were slaughtered indiscriminately and this was a scene repeated across the region. In the 19th century, carbonised remains of burnt grain could still be found in the ruins of Montbrun-Lauragais and it was said that even the Pope feared for his safety at Avignon. It is likely that Edward's famous nickname originates from this raid - in the parts that he passed through he was known as 'le terrible Prince Noir'. The damage was such that well into the 20th century there was a local oral tradition among peasants who related stories about a figure known as 'L'Homme Noir' who had passed by with an army in the Middle Ages.

The chevauchée also disrupted the economic productivity of the region and consequently the French ability to withstand English attacks was diminished. Edward's steward explained, "The countryside and towns which have been destroyed in this raid produced more revenue for the king of France in aid of his wars than half his kingdom." In December 1355, Edward justified the raid in a letter to the Bishop of Winchester: "We rode afterwards through the land of Armagnac, harrying and wasting the country, whereby the lieges of our said most honoured lord, whom the count had before oppressed, were much comforted." Edward was implying that the local nobility were grateful for his intervention but was apparently unconcerned about the suffering that his army committed. This coldness implies that Edward only reserved his chivalric behaviour for fellow members of the nobility.

Triumph at Poitiers

In August 1356, Edward launched another chevauchée into France from Aquitaine. He adopted a scorched earth policy as he advanced north to ease pressure on English garrisons in northern and central France, but was stopped at Tours when he failed to take the castle. At the same time, he heard that John II was marching south from Normandy to destroy his army at Tours, so Edward began to retreat back towards Bordeaux but the French king caught up with him near Poitiers. At this stage Edward offered to give up the loot his army had stolen in exchange for a safe passage but this was rebuffed. With no options left, Edward turned his Anglo-Gascon army of 6,000 men to face a French army of at least 20,000 on 19 September. He formed his army into three divisions with his archers on the flanks and retained his own division in the rear with an elite cavalry unit. Edward then arranged his men behind a low hedge for protection, with marshes to the left and wagons to the right.

King John arranged his own men into four 'battles' led by himself, the Dauphin, Baron Clermont and the Duke of Orléans. Both the Dauphin and Clermont attacked the English, but were swept back by hails of arrows and counterattacks by English men-at-arms. The Dauphin's forces then crashed into Orléans' approaching division, before running into John's division, causing confusion. Had the French not panicked at this stage, they could have routed Edward's men who were becoming exhausted and had started to collect their wounded. Instead Edward ordered his men to break cover from the hedge and charged the French while simultaneously launching his cavalry to flank the enemy. After a hard fight, the English stood their ground and the French line collapsed.

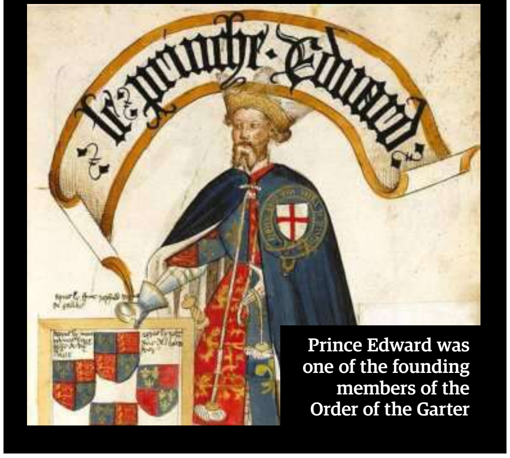
It was a huge victory for Edward. At a minimal cost, 2,000 Frenchmen were killed with another 2,000 captured including the biggest prize: King

The Garter

The Prince of Wales helped to found one of the United Kingdom's most prestigious honours

Prince Edward was actively involved in the foundation of the Order of the Garter in what is usually accepted as 1348. Today it is the third most prestigious honour that the British state can award after the Victoria and George Crosses, with membership numbers always capped at 24 Companions. It has a reputation for epitomising the chivalric knightly ideal but its foundation was grounded much more in the power politics of the time. The Order was designed to bring together the inner circle of Edward III's military commanders in France, who also happened to be his companions in the jousting arena. Some of the earliest records of the Order's existence come from Prince Edward's wardrobe accounts. In December 1348 Edward's wardrobe keeper bought 24 garters that were given to the first knights at an unspecified date. At the home of the Order in Saint George's Chapel, Windsor, one of the sets of facing stalls was designated for Edward III and the other designated for Prince Edward.

The reason for the Order's foundation is generally accepted as being political, which is reflected in the choice of heraldry and motto. On the Order's badge the gold and blue of France is combined with words that refer to the English claim to the French throne, 'Shame on him who thinks evil of it'. The romantic origins for the Order were invented in later years and have no basis in reality. Indeed, the Order was effectively an official celebration of the English victory at Crécy and cemented the companionship of the king, prince and nobles who had taken part. The choice of the garter itself possibly originated in a tournament badge, particularly as it had the practical advantage that it could be worn outside armour.



Prince Edward was one of the founding members of the Order of the Garter

> "It was effectively a form of authorised terrorism, and was used throughout the Hundred Years' War, with Edward helping to legitimise this wanton destruction"

The Battle of Najera

On 3 April 1367, the Prince of Wales used the famous English longbowmen to win a brilliant victory in Spain

Nájera was the Black Prince's last great triumph and is interesting because it was a victory of the English longbow that was fought not in France, but in Spain. When Peter the Cruel of Castile was deposed by his half-brother Henry of Trastámara, he travelled to Bordeaux where he appealed to Edward to help regain his throne. Edward, who needed Peter to topple a French ally like Henry, assembled an Anglo-Gascon-Majorcan army of 28,000 men and crossed the Pyrenees in February 1367 and marched into Spain. On 3 April, he encountered a combined Castilian-French army of 60,000 men near the town of Nájera. He faced not just Henry, but the renowned Breton soldier Bertrand du Guesclin, the future Constable of France.

> "The heavy cavalry charg but are shot down before they even reach the units they are attacking"

1 Du Guesclin Strikes

Leading the vanguard, Bertrand du Guesclin smashes into the division of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. English archers disperse the Castilian crossbowmen but the battle turns into a tightly pressed melee. Lancaster and du Guesclin remain locked in hand-to-hand combat for the rest of the battle.

2 Castilian Cavalry Charge

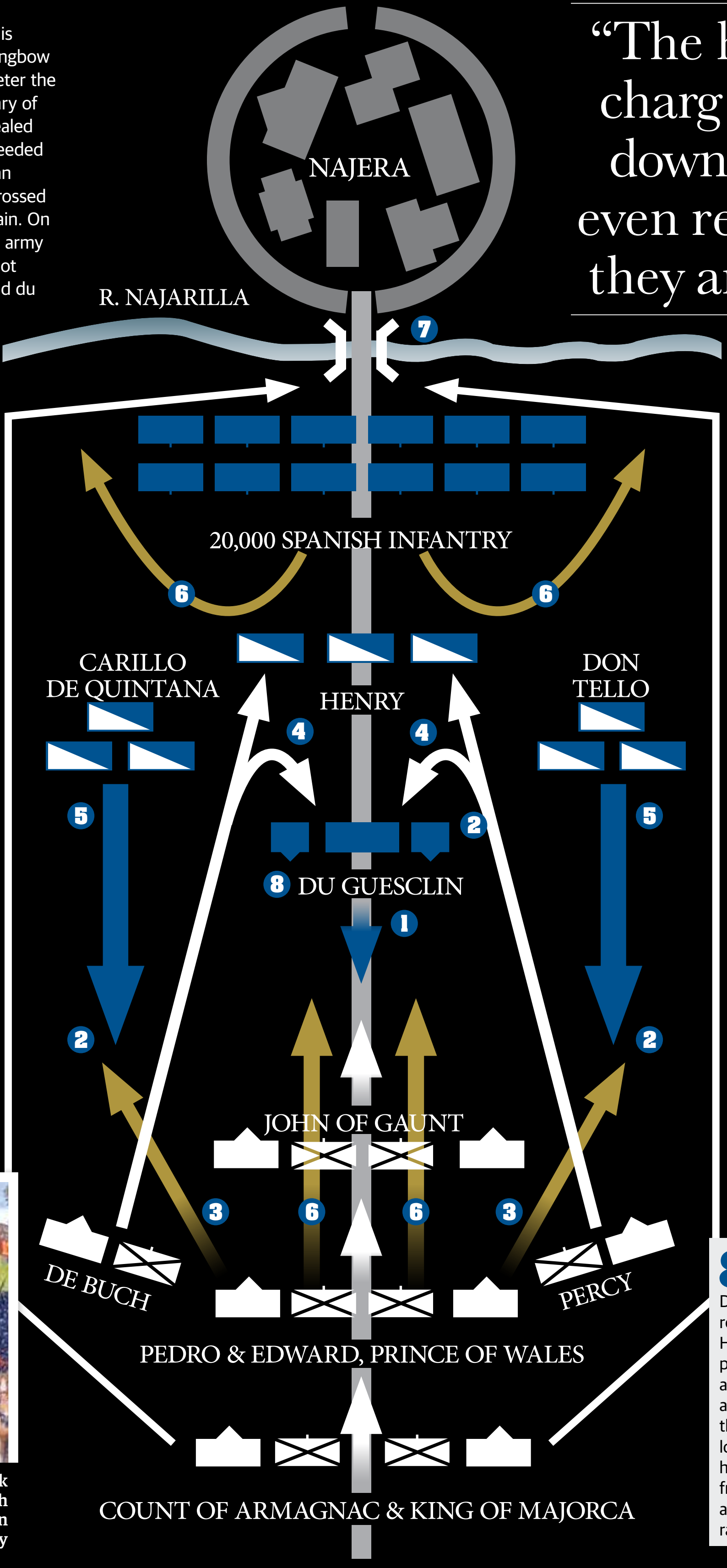
The Castilian light cavalry now charge the opposing flanks of Edward's army. They harass the sides of the opposition and probe for weak spots for heavy cavalry to break through but the archers shoot them down in droves.

3 English archers decimate cavalry

The Castilian light cavalry try to reorganise but are once again hampered by English arrows. In an attempt to restore morale, the heavy cavalry charge but are shot down before they even reach the units they are attacking. The remaining cavalry flees the field.

4 Percy and de Buch combine forces

The flanks of Sir Thomas Percy and Jean de Grailly III, Captal de Buch now move forward together and link up behind du Guesclin's division, which is still fighting Lancaster. The men-at-arms turn to face du Guesclin's men from the rear while the archers face out against the inevitable Castilian counterattack.



5 Henry attacks the Anglo-Gascon line

Henry of Trastámara realises that the Percy-de Buch line has to be broken. His knights charge three times but they are continually repulsed by arrows.

6 Henry's last gamble

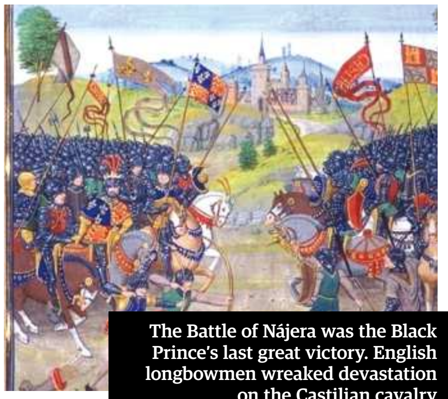
Edward now moves up his own central division to increase pressure on du Guesclin. Henry desperately sends in his infantry en masse, but it never gets to Edward's division. Despite being outnumbered, the archers wait until the infantry are in range and then loose continuous volleys. Both Henry and his infantry flee the field.

7 Murder by the River Najerilla

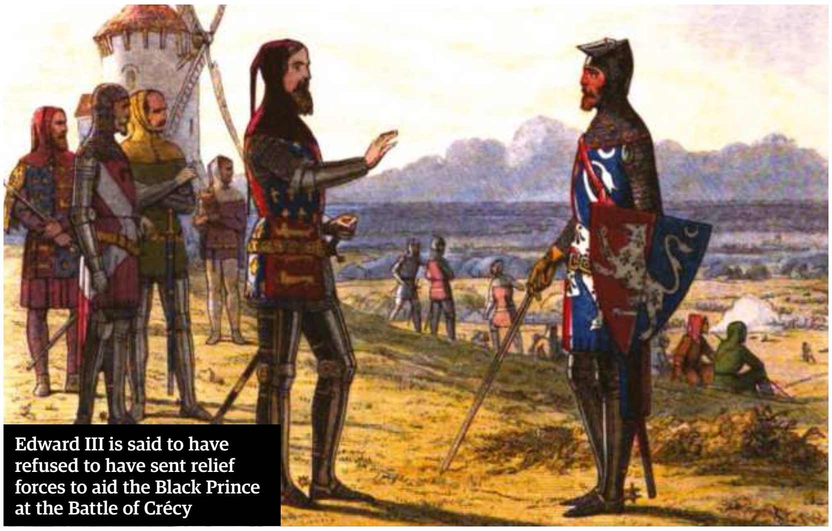
The Castilian cavalry is able to scatter but the infantry can only escape over a narrow bridge across the Najerilla. The fresh third division in the Anglo-Gascon army, which is led by the King of Majorca, sweeps around the Percy-de Buch line and chase after the infantry. Many Castilians are killed both in the press and by drowning.

8 Du Guesclin surrenders

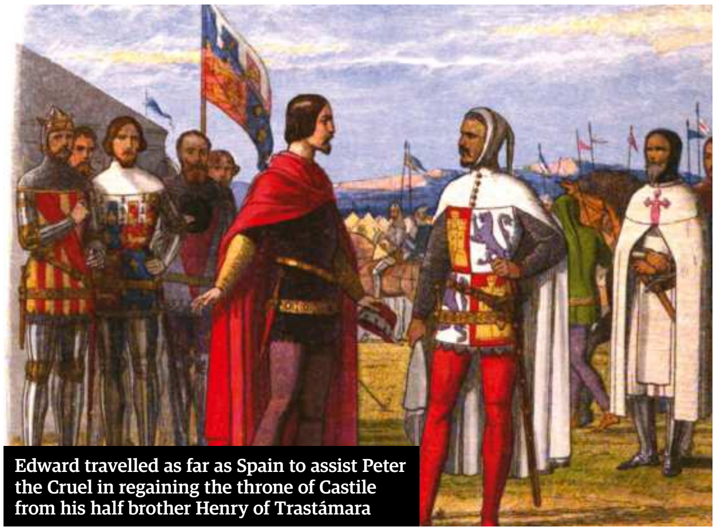
By now completely surrounded, Du Guesclin does not surrender until he realises that the Castilian army has gone. He surrenders to Captal de Buch who had previously been captured by du Guesclin at the Battle of Cocherel. The French and Castilians suffer 7,000 dead while the Anglo-Gascon casualties are much lower. Prince Edward is victorious and has to prevent a vengeful Peter the Cruel from executing any prisoners out of hand after the battle, arguing for very valuable ransoms instead.



The Battle of Nájera was the Black Prince's last great victory. English longbowmen wreaked devastation on the Castilian cavalry



Edward III is said to have refused to have sent relief forces to aid the Black Prince at the Battle of Crécy



Edward travelled as far as Spain to assist Peter the Cruel in regaining the throne of Castile from his half brother Henry of Trastámara

John. He was brought to Edward's tent, where the prince served him and according to one chronicler said that John's personal bravery, "had outdone his own greatest knights". This was little consolation to John who was taken back to England in triumph. Edward was treated to a great procession in London, where the water conduits apparently ran with wine, while John wore a sombre black robe. He had good reason to; his capture had huge ramifications in France where his ransom was more than the yearly income of the country. Some said it was twice as much and John eventually died in English captivity, with his country in a broken state of anarchy.

Into darkness

Poitiers was the pinnacle of Edward's military career and he seemed ready to succeed his father as a powerful King Edward IV of England. He ruled Aquitaine as a semi-independent principality between the years of 1360-67 and won a further dramatic victory in Spain at Nájera in 1367, but after the Spanish campaign he became his health began to deteriorate rapidly.

In a highly controversial incident at the Siege of Limoges in 1370, a now litter-bound prince ordered the sacking of the captured town. According to the chronicler, Jean Froissart, "It was a most melancholy business; for all ranks, ages and sexes cast themselves on their knees before the prince, begging for mercy; but he was so inflamed with passion and revenge that he listened to none, but all were put to the sword, wherever they could be found." This has since been highly disputed among historians, but whatever the truth, Limoges greatly stained Edward's reputation.

The prince's health continued to deteriorate and he died aged 46 in 1376, just one year before his father. The once mighty prince never became king of England, and instead left a mixed legacy behind of military glory, selective chivalry and a bitter memory of brutal bloodshed.

> "It was a huge victory for Edward. At a minimal cost, 2,000 Frenchmen were killed with another 2,000 captured including the biggest prize: King John"

Edward died in 1376 and was buried in Canterbury Cathedral, the first Prince of Wales never to succeed to the throne of England

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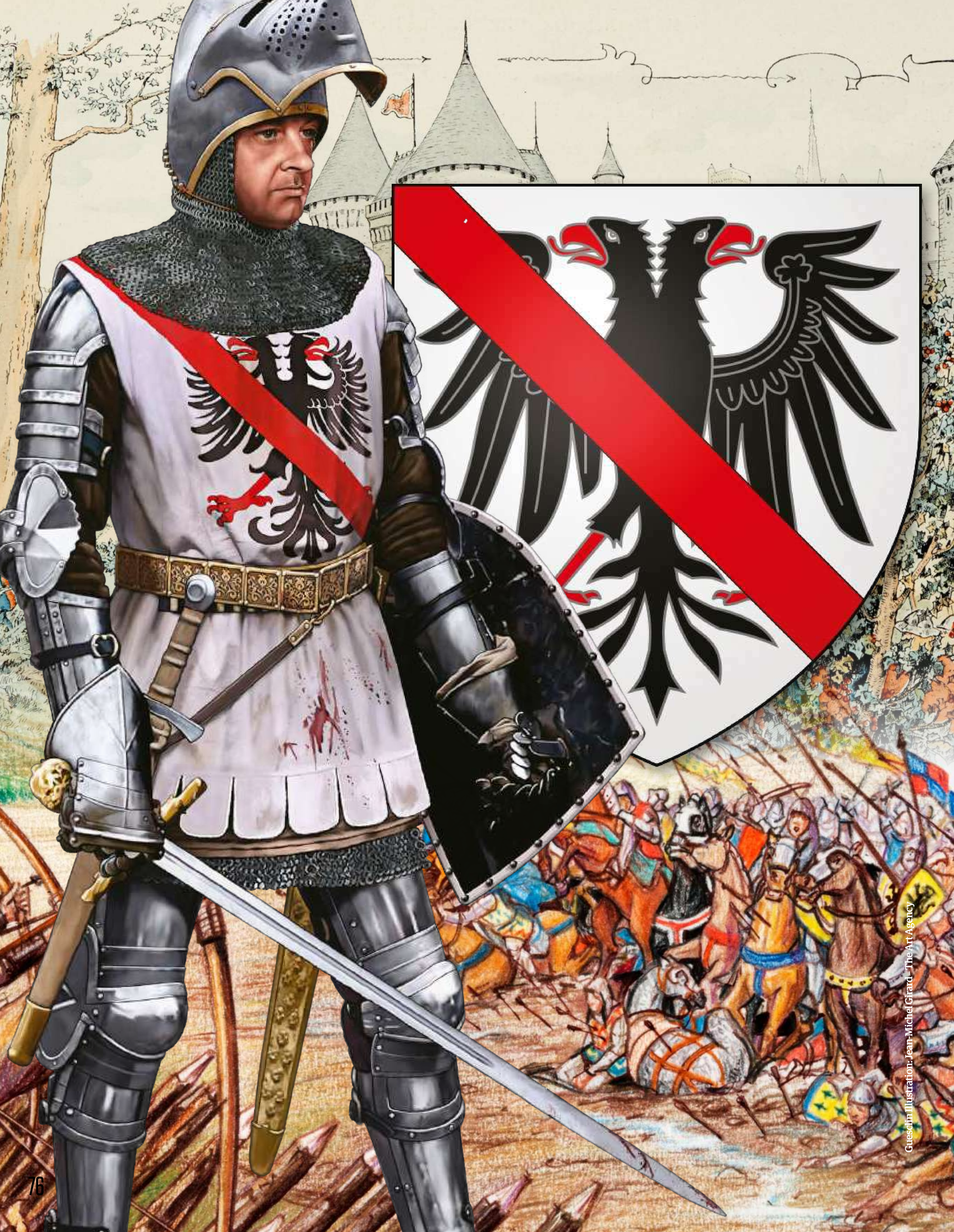


Guesclin Illustration: Jean-Michel Girard - The Art Agency

Bertrand du Guesclin

The Eagle of Brittany was the first French commander to decisively defeat the English during the Hundred Years' War and rose from obscurity to the highest office in the kingdom

The Hundred Years' War has been defined by the historical figures that emerged out of the chaos that engulfed France between 1337-1453. Most of them were English royalty and included Edward III, the Black Prince and Henry V - men who led endless campaigns to pursue what they considered to be their rightful claim to the French throne. Between them they won great victories that became famous, including the battles of Crécy, Poitiers and Agincourt.

It is also often presumed that an effective French resistance only emerged in the late 1420s under the unlikely leadership of the illiterate peasant girl Joan of Arc. However, this is a grave misinterpretation of events. Far from being a continuous conflict, the period was punctuated by cycles of both war and peace and victory did not always belong to the English. Before the dramatic conquests of Henry V, there had been a remarkably successful period of French resurgence where the majority of Edward III's territorial gains were overturned. The man most responsible for this reversal was a Breton knight of obscure origins but near infinite courage: Bertrand du Guesclin.

A Breton squire

Nicknamed as 'The Black Dog of Brocéliande' or 'The Eagle of Brittany', du Guesclin was arguably the most renowned captain who fought for France during the Hundred Years' War, but his early life gave little indication of his future greatness.

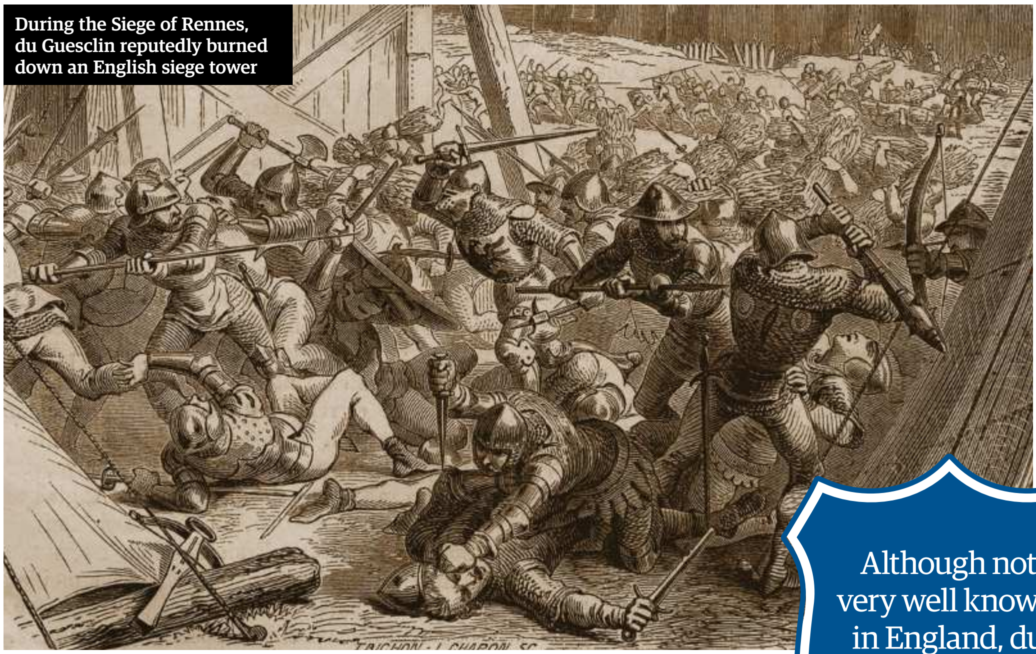
Born around 1320 near Dinan in Brittany, du Guesclin was the eldest of ten children and his family were a minor branch of the Breton nobility. As his father was only a 'seigneur' (lord of the manor), du Guesclin was a mere squire and he grew up to become famously ugly and of small stature. One story claims that his beautiful mother rejected him at first sight.

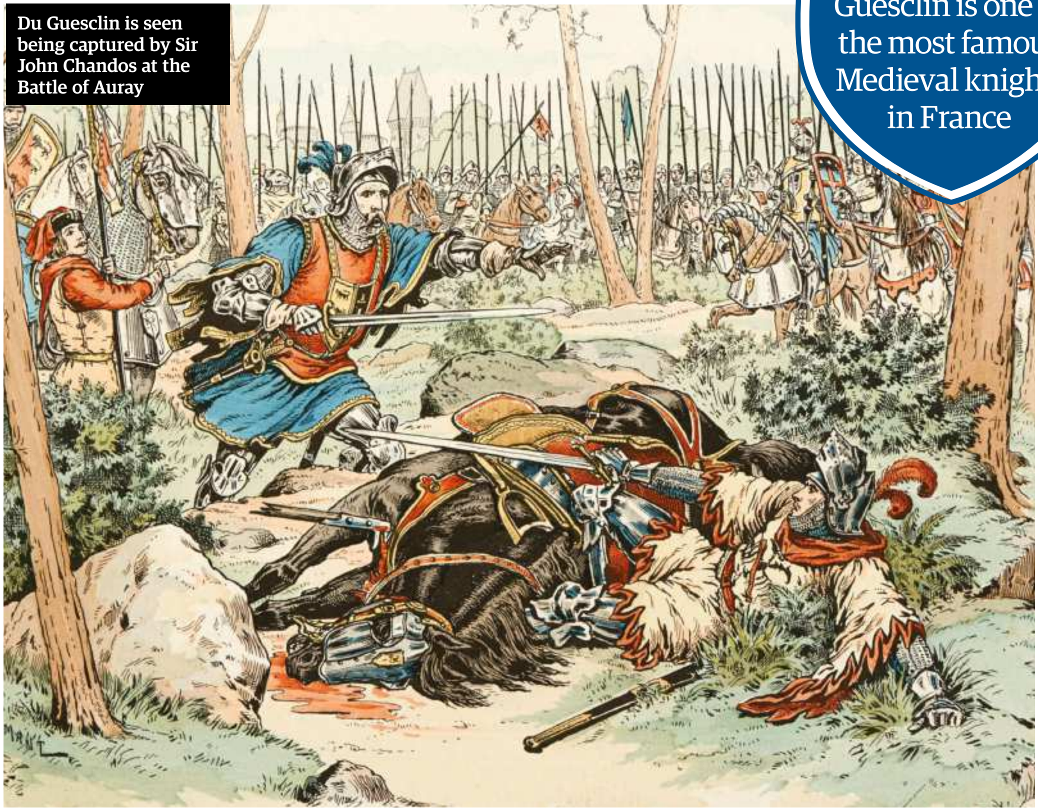
Like many young men of his status, du Guesclin entered his local military service in the 1340s as a mercenary captain in the service of Charles of Blois before entering the service of King John II of France in 1351. After succeeding his father as the seigneur of Broons du Guesclin, he was then knighted by the marshal of France in 1354 and from that point on, he spent the rest of his life serving the kingdom.

Du Guesclin's first prominent action came during the Siege of Rennes between 1356-57 where he took a leading role defending the town from the besieging army of Henry of Grosmont, duke of Lancaster. This was notable in the wake of almost unbroken English successes, particularly after the crushing Battle of Poitiers the previous year. One man who recognised the emerging talent of du Guesclin was the Dauphin Charles, who granted him a life pension of 200 livres and named him the captain of Pontorson, which was a strategic fortress on the Breton-Norman frontier.

Following this initial achievement, du Guesclin suffered a series of setbacks when he was captured by the English twice between 1359-60. In a telling sign of how low French fortunes had sunk, du Guesclin paid his ransoms by borrowing money from the duke of Orléans, who was himself a prisoner in the Tower of London.

By the 1360s, France was crippled. With John II held prisoner by Edward III after Poitiers, the English demanded a huge ransom of 3 million crowns as part of the Treaty of Brétigny. Under its terms, the English retained Aquitaine and acquired new territories that comprised a quarter of France


During the Siege of Rennes, du Guesclin reputedly burned down an English siege tower


Du Guesclin is seen being captured by Sir John Chandos at the Battle of Auray

"In a telling sign of how low French fortunes had sunk, du Guesclin paid his ransoms by borrowing money from the duke of Orléans, who was himself a prisoner in the Tower of London"

in full sovereignty. Nevertheless, upon John's death in 1364, the kingdom gained a new monarch who would largely reverse the humiliations of Brétigny.

Cocherel and Auray

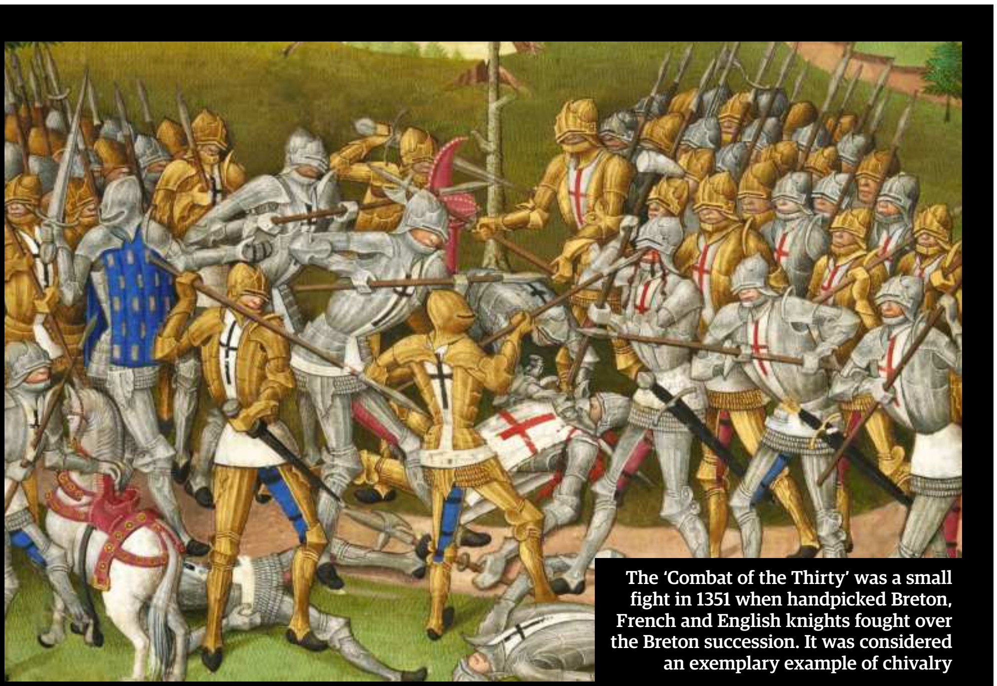
Charles V's succession to the throne was difficult. Even before his father's death, he had to contend with the English and the king of Navarre, known as 'Charles the Bad'. This Pyrenean monarch held extensive lands in Normandy, which enabled him to blockade Paris. When he was deprived of what he saw as his rightful claim to the duchy of Burgundy, Charles the Bad raised two armies and passed through Aquitaine en route to Normandy with the Black Prince's permission. His Anglo-Gascon forces were commanded by a notable soldier called Jean de Grailly, Captal de Buch but the Dauphin Charles already had 1,000 'routier' mercenaries in Normandy. This small force was ostensibly commanded by the count of Auxerre, but it was actually led by du Guesclin who followed Charles's orders to attack Navarrese fortresses. By the time the captal arrived in Normandy, most of the strongholds had surrendered and du Guesclin blocked his eastern path in a defensive line before the River Eure. The captal's army numbered around 6,000, in comparison to the 1,500-3,000 that du Guesclin had scraped together, but neither commander wanted to make the first move. The opposing armies faced each other in a two-day standoff near Houlbec-Cocherel.

Although not very well known in England, du Guesclin is one of the most famous Medieval knights in France

On 16 May 1364, du Guesclin attempted to withdraw when his food supplies ran low but the captal was determined to prevent his escape and sent in his cavalry to outflank the French and block their access to the Eure bridge. The Battle of Cocherel was now in earnest and it was strongly contested. The Navarrese army initially had the upper hand, thanks to their superior numbers, but the French managed to outflank them. Du Guesclin then forced a retreat when he deployed his Breton reserves. Miserably surprised by this reversal of fortune, the captal's forces fled and he was personally surrounded with 50 of his men and fought in a bloody last stand. The captal was wounded and captured while the majority of his men were killed.

It was a dramatic victory for du Guesclin, and his success bode well for the future as the battle had taken place three days before Charles V's coronation. Charles the Bad's streak was broken and Navarre never seriously threatened France again.

One king may have been defeated but Charles V still had many problems. Although the war with England was officially over, it nevertheless continued in du Guesclin's home duchy of Brittany. Over 20 years, two factions under the houses of Blois and Montfort fought for the ducal title and the English ruthlessly exploited the destabilising situation. Charles supported the Blois faction and



The 'Combat of the Thirty' was a small fight in 1351 when handpicked Breton, French and English knights fought over the Breton succession. It was considered an exemplary example of chivalry

The fight for Brittany

The birthplace of du Guesclin was a proud duchy that acted as a pawn in the bloody power games between England and France

To talk of 'France' in the modern sense cannot be accurately applied to its status during the Middle Ages. Although the French king technically ruled all the lands that roughly make up the country as we know it today, regional power was highly devolved and dukes often ruled as semi-independent powers. Brittany was no exception. It was one of the most powerful duchies in the kingdom and was therefore, a fierce battleground between the kings of England and France.

Located on the far western peninsula of France, Brittany was unique. Unlike the Frankish majority, the population descended from Britons and had their own language and cultural identity. This separateness made the local dukes fiercely independent and they only paid a token homage to the king of France. This led to open conflict in 1341, when there was a power struggle for the duchy. The French counts of Blois claimed Brittany but were opposed by the Montforts, who were related to the ancient dukes. The subsequent War of Breton Succession lasted for 23 years and occurred at a time when the first major phase of the Hundred Years' War was at its height. The English ruthlessly exploited this destabilised situation and supported the Montforts, while the French backed the Blois'.

Du Guesclin, who was a proud Breton himself, became embroiled in this fight and his loyalty to the French monarchy compromised his affection for his homeland. His defeat at the Battle of Auray in 1364 not only ended the war in the Montfort's favour, but also gave him a lifelong sense of split loyalties, which culminated in a royal loss of favour by both England and France towards the end of his life. Even today, some of the Breton nationalists view du Guesclin as a traitor for his allegiance to France.

du Guesclin was sent to Brittany in September 1364 to aid Duke Charles of Blois in his claim.

The two armies of Blois and John of Montfort met at Auray on 29 September and the Montfortian army was conspicuous due to its extensive use of English soldiers and commanders. Out of the five commanders fighting against du Guesclin, three were English and the famous longbowmen were a conspicuous presence. Against this military machine, du Guesclin's chances were unfavourable and although the armies were evenly matched at between 3,500-4,000 men, the English-dominated Montfortians prevailed.

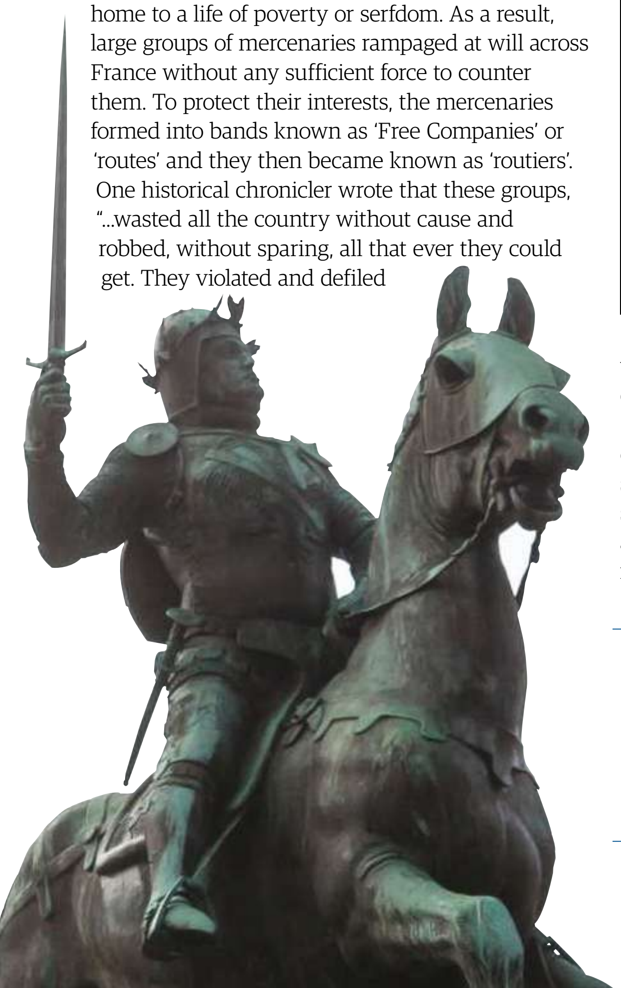
The combat was particularly bloody as both sides wanted the encounter to end the Breton war and no quarter was given. The most significant casualty was Charles of Blois, who was killed, and du Guesclin was forced to surrender to the English commander, Sir John Chandos, but only after he had broken all of his weapons. John of Montfort was now recognised by Charles V as Duke John IV but despite du Guesclin's defeat, Charles ransomed him and he was soon back in royal service. The reason for this rehabilitation became clear as the king needed du Guesclin to deal with perhaps the most serious problem in his kingdom besides the English: the merciless 'routiers'.

'Routiers' and Spain

After the Treaty of Brétigny, many soldiers were left unemployed, particularly those who had served under Edward III or the Black Prince. While on campaign, these men had grown accustomed to living off the land and they were reluctant to return home to a life of poverty or serfdom. As a result, large groups of mercenaries rampaged at will across France without any sufficient force to counter them. To protect their interests, the mercenaries formed into bands known as 'Free Companies' or 'routes' and they then became known as 'routiers'. One historical chronicler wrote that these groups, "…wasted all the country without cause and robbed, without sparing, all that ever they could get. They violated and defiled women without pity and slewed men, women and children without mercy."

The routiers were particularly dangerous because of their professionalism. Not only were they former soldiers, but each company had a command structure with a staff to collect and distribute loot and some even had their own uniforms. Their nationalities varied and included Bretons, Spaniards and Germans but the majority were either Gascon or English with the latter being the most dominant group. Tellingly, the French described all routiers as 'English' and many of the most successful captains were enemies of du Guesclin, such as Sir Robert Knolles and Sir Hugh Calveley. Knolles became so notorious for burning towns that charred gables were nicknamed 'Knolles's Mitres'. Elsewhere,

> "Large groups of mercenaries rampaged at will across France without a sufficient force to counter them"



> "Known as 'Charles the Wise', he was physically frail but was nevertheless, highly educated and pragmatically resourceful"

Sir John Harleston's routiers once had a party where they drank from 100 chalices stolen from Champagne churches.

This organised chaos was a widespread problem and Charles V had neither the troops nor money to deal with them. However, he sent du Guesclin to rid Anjou of the routiers. This was a shrewd move as du Guesclin was a former mercenary himself, but the Breton managed to clear the area in a short space of time. In 1365, an opportunity arose when a pretender to the Castilian throne called Henry of Trastámara asked Charles for assistance against his half-brother King Pedro the Cruel. Sensing an opportunity, Charles ordered du Guesclin to recruit every routier he could find and sent this new army to Spain to assist Henry.

At first, du Guesclin's army performed well and many fortresses were captured, including Briviesca, Magallon and even the Castilian capital of Burgos. Henry was delighted with the results and proclaimed du Guesclin as the ruler of Granada, even though the Moors still held that territory. However, as Aquitaine was on the other side of the Pyrenees, it was not long before the English saw another chance to harass the French. Like the war in Brittany, the Castilian Civil War was a sub-conflict of the wider wars with England, and Edward the Black Prince was an ally of Pedro.

Edward led an Anglo-Gascon army into Spain to fight du Guesclin's force, which led to a famous battle at Nájera on 3 April 1367. The clash was notable for the use of English longbowmen in an unfamiliar landscape away from France and the British Isles. Du Guesclin led a hand-picked vanguard of 1,500 men-at-arms and 500 crossbowmen in Henry's Franco-Castilian army - outnumbering Edward's force.

Directly facing him was a division of English archers and infantrymen led by Edward's brother, John of Gaunt. Captal de Buch, du Guesclin's defeated enemy from Cocherel, was also present. During the battle, du Guesclin was engaged in fierce hand-to-hand fighting with Gaunt's division in the centre while chaos raged all around. The English archers inflicted heavy damage on Henry's light cavalry on the flanks, which eventually caused them and the infantry to flee. Du Guesclin, who was surrounded in the centre, was completely unaware of the rout and only surrendered when he was informed of the situation. By the time the battle was over, a quarter of his force was dead and virtually everyone else was injured.

Nájera was a painful defeat but once again Charles V quickly ransomed du Guesclin as he now considered him to be invaluable. The Breton returned to Spain with a larger army and this time his fortunes changed when Edward left Spain after Pedro refused to pay the English campaign costs. Henry was now in a stronger position and at the Battle of Montiel on 14 March 1369, Pedro was decisively defeated. The victory was largely du Guesclin's achievement; he led Henry's army and used enveloping tactics to crush Pedro's Castilian-Moorish force. Despite this success, the greater drama came immediately after the battle.

Pedro fled to Montiel Castle and attempted to bribe the pursuing du Guesclin to allow him to escape. Du Guesclin agreed but he also informed Henry, who also bribed him to lead him to Pedro's tent. Once inside, the brothers began a fight to the death with daggers. Pedro gained the upper hand but at the last moment, the compromised du Guesclin took hold of Pedro, which allowed Henry to kill him. During this complicity in regal fratricide, du Guesclin is alleged to have said: "I neither put nor remove a king, but I help my master." This wilful abdication of responsibility reaped its dubious reward and a grateful Henry proclaimed du Guesclin as Duke of Molina and sealed the Franco-Castilian alliance. With his work completed, du Guesclin returned to France to once more aid his king.

Constable of France

By 1370, Charles V was ready to take the fight back to the English. Known as 'Charles the Wise', he was physically frail but nevertheless highly educated and pragmatic. He stopped sending the crippling ransom payments that were still owed for John II's English imprisonment and reorganised his taxation system to fund a new force that was arguably France's first standing army. This consisted of 3,000-6,000 men-at-arms and 800 crossbowmen. He also gave orders for townsmen to practice archery and to keep castles in good repair.

These preparations were made for a military offensive, but not one that involved any direct confrontations with the English. Charles knew that his armies could not defeat his enemies in open battle and so he contrived to win back his lost territory by adopting a scorched earth policy, guerrilla raids and forbidding his troops to openly engage the English.

Fabius Maximus is regarded the father of guerrilla warfare and gave his name to the concept of 'Fabian Strategy'

The Fabian strategy

The French resurgence in the 1370s owed much to a unique method of warfare where avoiding battles could win campaigns

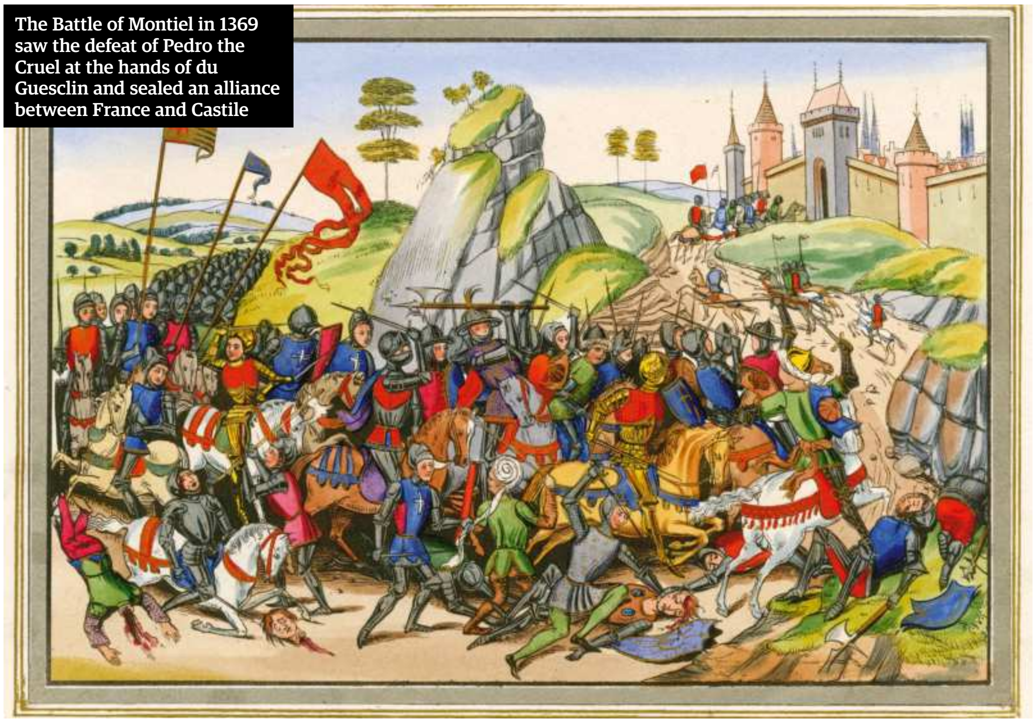
Du Guesclin was one of the most famous Medieval implementers of an unorthodox but effective method of campaigning: the Fabian strategy.

The strategy's approach involves one side avoiding large, pitched battles in favour of smaller actions that wear down the enemy's will to fight through attrition. It is a difficult approach to warfare, as frequent retreats and less obvious signs of victory can be demoralising. It also requires favourable lengths of time and a strong will from both soldiers and politicians.

During the Hundred Years' War, Charles V and his constable used their combined talents and France's great size to carry out a successful Fabian strategy between 1370-80. Du Guesclin used tactics such as raids, ambushes, night attacks and frequent harassment to whittle down English regional power. He would concentrate on small, isolated garrisons, attacking foraging parties and cutting communications.

These guerrilla actions were reinforced by shrewd negotiating skills. Good terms, and even rewards were offered at sieges to ensure a quick surrender and du Guesclin always made a point of keeping his word. He also offered protection to French inhabitants in English territory if they rose against their masters. The strategy worked well, particularly as du Guesclin stuck to Charles V's orders not to directly the engage the English and consequently, large swathes of French land were won back.

The French Fabian strategy was not a new concept and it actually derives its name from the methods used by Roman dictator Fabius Maximus, to defeat Hannibal in Italy. It has also been used by a diverse number generals and countries, including George Washington, the Russians against Napoleon in 1812, the Vietnamese during the First Indochina War and even insurgents during the Iraq War.



The Battle of Montiel in 1369 saw the defeat of Pedro the Cruel at the hands of du Guesclin and sealed an alliance between France and Castile

Perhaps his most radical strategy was breaking with knightly chivalric traditions by appointing commanders who had proved themselves as captains of frontier garrisons or even as routiers. These men would not be paladins but hardnosed professionals, and chief among these soldiers was du Guesclin himself.

In 1370, Charles appointed the former squire as Constable of France. This ancient office made du Guesclin the highest officer in the land after the king and effectively commander-in-chief of his military forces. Senior members of the nobility usually filled the position, but Charles needed a seasoned soldier who could appeal to the routiers to fight for him. In this regard, despite his patchy military record, du Guesclin perfect. He also agreed with Charles's strategy and from the outset, the French began to achieve successes against their ancient foe.

> Du Guesclin was buried in the Basilica of Saint-Denis among the kings of France, showing his importance

The test came almost immediately when Sir Robert Knolles launched a large raid into the Île de France and devastated the countryside up to the gates of Paris in September 1370. From his palace, Charles V could even see the rising smoke of burning villages, but he still refused to engage in battle. Du Guesclin deliberately waited until the enemy split up and then pounced on a contingent of 4,000 men led by Sir Thomas Grandison at Pontvallain on 4 December.

After a night march, the fight began at dawn with the French initially taking heavy casualties but the English were eventually either killed or captured, including Grandison. A similar fight took place at a nearby engagement at Vaas and Knolles was forced to call off his raid; the pursuing du Guesclin subsequently killed around 300 English soldiers outside the gates of Bressuire.

Although it was a relatively small battle, Pontvallain broke the decades-old aura of English invincibility and du Guesclin proceeded to reconquer Poitou and Saintonge between 1371-72 and even temporarily overran Brittany in 1373. During these campaigns, and the ones that followed for the next five years, du Guesclin slowly clawed back French lands and made inroads into English Aquitaine. There were even French naval raids on English home territories such as Guernsey, Rye, Plymouth and Lewes.

Du Guesclin's high point as constable arguably came in 1377, when he defeated Edward III's Aquitanian representative Thomas Felton at the Battle of Eymet. So many soldiers drowned after the battle that the area around the River Dropt was known as the 'Englishmen's Hole' for centuries afterwards. After Eymet, du Guesclin came within a day's march of Bordeaux and took Bergerac.

Although Pontvallain and Eymet were notable battlefield victories, du Guesclin's successes were largely won by deliberately avoiding the English where he could. Consequently, the English were left with no one to fight and they wasted vast resources marching through French territory on campaigns that would ultimately amount to nothing. The most costly of these campaigns was arguably John of Gaunt's 1373 raid, which struck out from Calais to Bordeaux and covered 965 kilometres in five months. The English cut a huge swathe of destruction through central France but they lost 5,000 men out of 11,000 and huge amounts of supplies without capturing a single town or fighting any battle. Consequently, by the mid-1370s, English territory in France had shrunk to the area around Calais and a reduced Aquitaine.

This achievement was due to the combined work of Charles V and du Guesclin but this military odd couple would end their partnership on very poor terms. Although he had loyally served the French crown for decades, du Guesclin was proud of his Breton roots and when Charles confiscated Brittany in 1378, the constable opposed the decision. He carried out the subsequent campaign into his homeland half-heartedly. The constable now lost favour with the French king for the first time and was dispatched far from court to Languedoc to suppress the routiers in the region. While he was besieging Chateauneuf-de-Randon, du Guesclin caught a fever and died aged around 60 on 13 July 1380. The sickly Charles died three weeks later but not before he had given orders for his loyal constable to be buried among the kings of France at the Basilica of Saint Denis.

This final act turned the already highly popular du Guesclin into a folk hero among both the French and Bretons. Here was a man who had fought his way from the status of a lowly squire, to being considered the equal of kings and in the process liberating the majority of France from a relentless invader. The kingdom would not see his like again for half a century.

What did du Geusclin look like?

Bertrand du Guesclin as he might have appeared during his tenure as Constable of France between 1370-80. His face is based on his tomb effigy in the Basilica of Saint Denis in Paris.

The plate armour is typical of the period and it is likely that a bascinet helmet would have been worn for head protection. Du Guesclin's distinctively white surcoat bears his arms: a double-headed eagle.

His sword 'Joyeuse' is the badge of office for the constables of France. This famous blade reputedly belonged to Charlemagne and may date back to the 9th century. Now exhibited in the Louvre Museum, it was used during the coronations of French kings and du Guesclin would have been presented with it by Charles V during his inauguration as constable.

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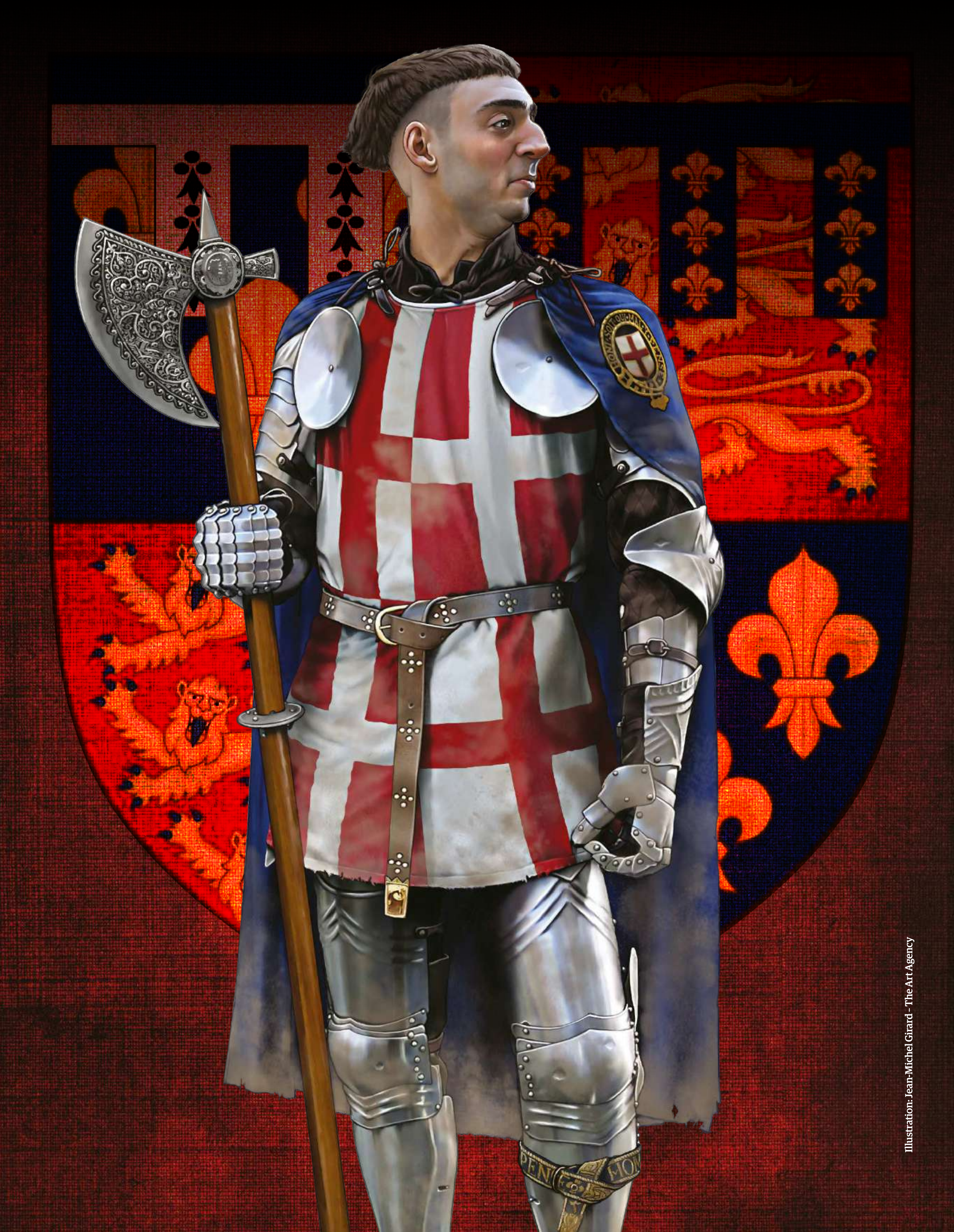


Illustration: Jean-Michel Girard - The Art Agency

John, Duke of Bedford

Henry V's younger brother continued the English conquest of France with stunning success, winning a huge battle in 1424. However, his greatest threat would come from a teenage peasant girl: Joan of Arc

In the early 15th century, an outnumbered English army lined up against a superior enemy force in northern France. Some 9,600 men stood ready to fight and die for King Henry of England, during the crown's ongoing struggle for control of France. With the help of longbows, the English won a resounding victory, against all the odds.

However, at this point comparisons with the Battle of Agincourt end. The king in question was not Henry V, but his two-year-old son Henry VI and the year was not 1415, but 1424. The battlefield itself was near a town called Verneuil, Normandy, and the English commander was Henry V's younger brother John, Duke of Bedford. His tremendous victory at Verneuil was soon dubbed by contemporaries as 'The Second Agincourt'. Bedford is an overlooked figure today, but he was a talented general and politician who successfully continued the English conquest of France during the latter part of the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) after the premature death of his older brother in 1422.

That he should be forgotten today is something of a mystery as his military victories were some of the most important of the entire conflict, and his life was heavily influenced by two of the most famous people of the period: Henry V and his arch-enemy Joan of Arc.

A sea fight off Harfleur

As the king's brother, Bedford had been assigned the task of administering England in 1415, while Henry V pursued his campaign in France, culminating in the victory at Agincourt. The king's spectacular success had been preceded by the capture of the strategic port of Harfleur on the coast of Normandy, but the adventure had been costly in casualties. Henry's overriding ambition was to complete the conquest of France that had been started by his great-grandfather Edward III. However, before 1415 the only English base on the northern French coast was Calais. Holding on to Harfleur was vital if Henry were to have an extra springboard for a second campaign to subdue Normandy and dictate terms.

The French knew this and started a naval blockade of Harfleur in April 1416, with the assistance of Genoese ships. The English had lost the initiative for the first time since Agincourt and a relief fleet was not able to sail until August. Henry couldn't take command, as he was negotiating an alliance with the visiting Holy Roman emperor, Sigismund I, and instead sent Bedford to relieve Harfleur. Bedford was not an obvious choice for command, as he had little military experience, and he would be facing perhaps 150 French and Genoese carracks. Genoese ships in particular had a fearsome reputation, but despite this, Bedford sailed to meet them with a fleet of about one hundred ships and on 15 August engaged in a fierce fight at the mouth of the River Seine.

Medieval naval battles were capable of replicating land warfare. The opposing ships would use grappling hooks to join together and form a vast, floating, wooden battlefield. The English had used their superiority with longbows to successfully fight at sea before and repeated this tactic in 1416.

An anonymous English chronicler wrote: "Following an exchange of missiles… the fury of the combatants had reached boiling point. At last, after a long, drawn-out and most bitter fight of five or six hours, victory was yielded to the English."

The Battle of the Seine was hard-fought because neither of the sides could afford defeat. The French, whose pride had been dented at Agincourt, were determined not to lose control of the English Channel and the English did not want to forfeit their foothold in Normandy. The English victory was strategically important. Although Agincourt had been a tactical victory, it did not lead to immediate success in the war and Bedford's victory cannot be overlooked. If Harfleur had been recaptured, Henry would have had to restart his conquests from scratch, completely altering the course of history.

The relief of Harfleur enabled Henry to conquer Normandy in 1417, which in led to the Treaty of Troyes in 1420. This acknowledged Henry as the heir to the French throne and laid the foundations for a dual monarchy, but none of this would have been possible without Bedford's victory.

His conduct during the fight was praised by contemporaries who said, "No one had borne himself more bravely in that battle." Emperor Sigismund was moved to say to Henry, "Happy are those subjects that have such a king, but more is the king that has such subjects."

It was Bedford who had Joan of Arc tried in 1431, and she was burned at the stake as a result of this

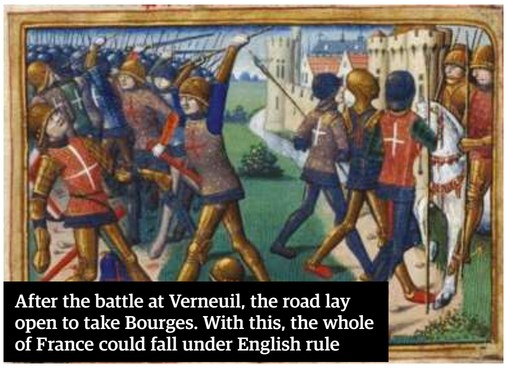
An unexpected regency

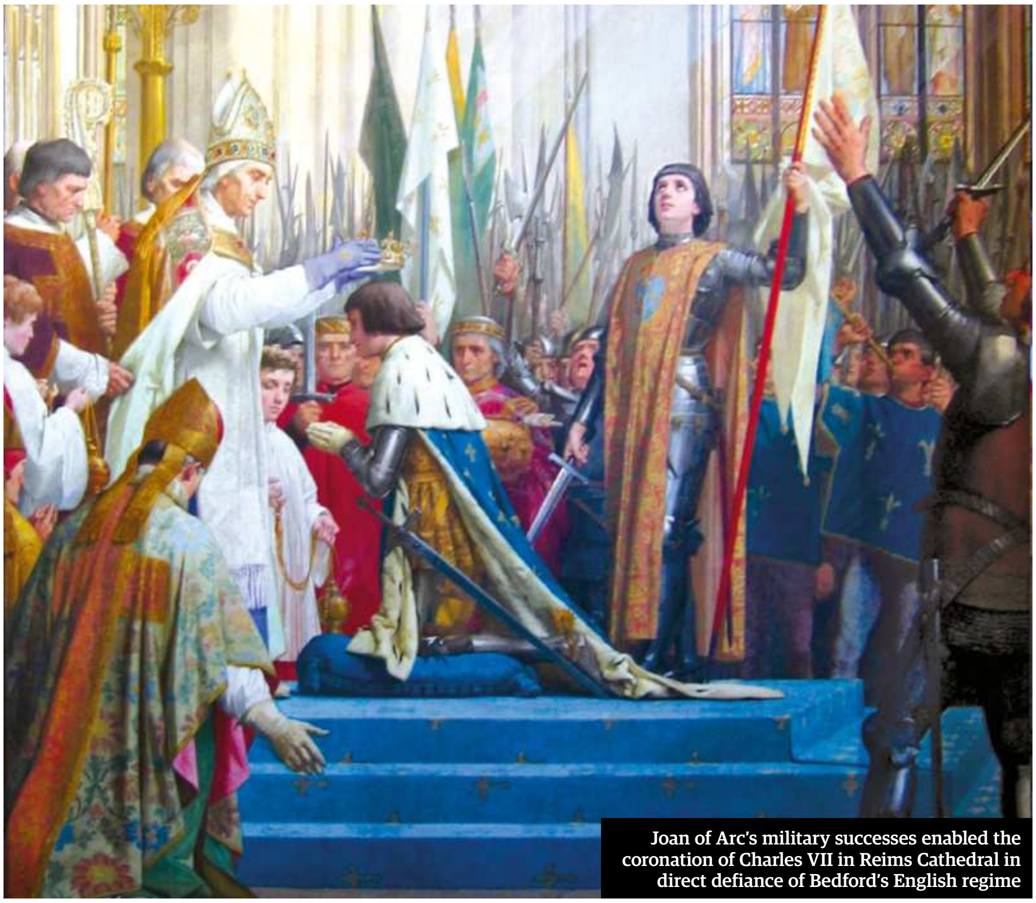
In 1422 Charles VI of France died and Henry V should have succeeded to the throne as king of both England and France. However, in one of history's most fateful ironies, the warrior king died of dysentery just a few months before Charles, aged 36, leaving his son Henry VI to inherit the dual kingdom instead.

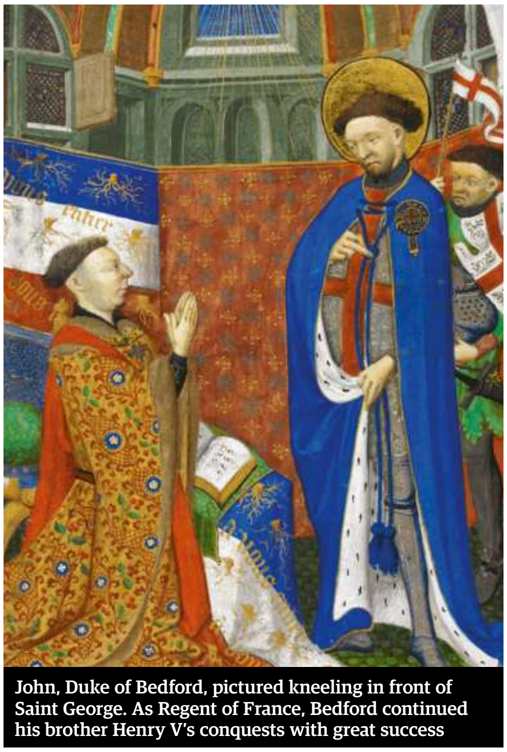
Unfortunately the new king was only nine-months old and the English administration had divided his lands into two governments. Henry V's youngest brother, Humphrey, ran England, while Bedford was named as the Regent of France. This was by far the hardest assignment, as Bedford had to continue his brother's conquests in the face of very stiff opposition by those who had regarded Charles VI's son, the Dauphin, as the real and true king of France.

One Victorian historian said Bedford was, "at once prime minister and commander-in-chief, he was virtually king of France." Additionally, Bedford had to maintain a tenuous alliance with the Duke of Burgundy. Burgundian support was essential to Bedford as the English did not have a numerical superiority in France, but the alliance was shaky

"His tremendous victory at Verneuil was soon dubbed by contemporaries as 'The Second Agincourt'"

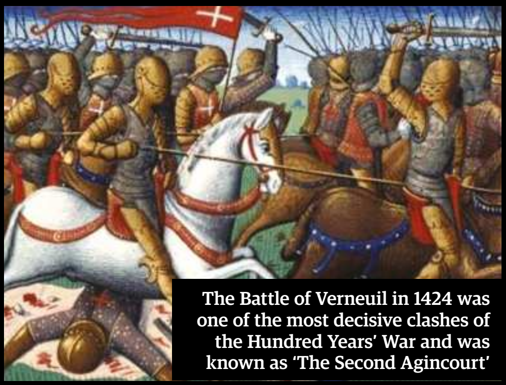

After the battle at Verneuil, the road lay open to take Bourges. With this, the whole of France could fall under English rule


Joan of Arc's military successes enabled the coronation of Charles VII in Reims Cathedral in direct defiance of Bedford's English regime


John, Duke of Bedford, pictured kneeling in front of Saint George. As Regent of France, Bedford continued his brother Henry V's conquests with great success

The Battle of Verneuil

In August 1424, northern France was secured for the English in a clash that came to be known as the 'Second Agincourt'



The Battle of Verneuil in 1424 was one of the most decisive clashes of the Hundred Years' War and was known as 'The Second Agincourt'

Bedford had won a great naval battle in 1416 but he was still untested on a traditional field of battle. By 1424, the war in France had reached a critical level. With Henry V dead and a toddler on two thrones, it was up to Bedford to advance the English cause in France. However, he was up against very formidable and unyielding opponents. French supporters of the Dauphin always outnumbered the English troops and they were assisted by a Scottish army that was intent on fighting the Regent to the death. Bedford was about to face his greatest challenge yet.

1 Bedford approaches

At the crack of dawn on 17 August, Bedford draws up his army of 9,600 men on the road from Damville in the northeast of Normandy where it emerges from a forest onto a plain in front of the town of Verneuil.

2 The English prepare

Bedford places his dismounted men-at-arms in the centre of the battle, while he positions his archers on the wings. Bedford commands the right division, while the Earl of Salisbury commands the left. There are two reserves, 2,000 mounted archers and a separate square and laagered baggage train where some horses are tethered amongst the wagons to pull them.

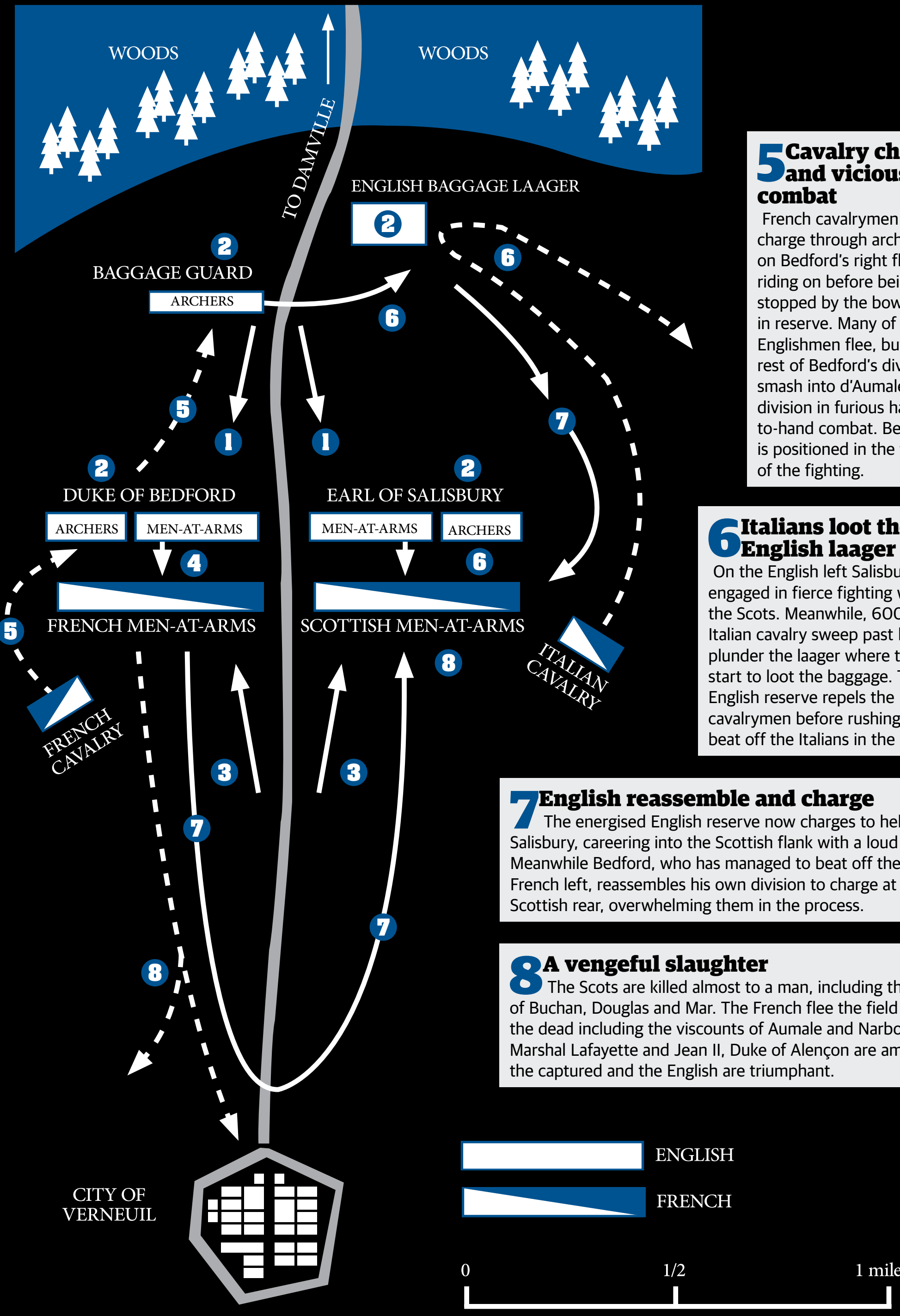
3 The French and Scots prepare

The Franco-Scottish army of 14-16,000 men form in two divisions of men-at-arms linked by archers while cavalry protects their wings. Viscount d'Aumale commands the left while the Earls of Buchan and Douglas command 6,000 Scots on the right.

4 Threats, deceit and an advance

The Scottish tell the English soldiers that they intend to give no quarter, but neither side makes to attack for hours in the sweltering sun. At approximately 4pm Bedford orders an advance. The English troops shout, "St George! Bedford!" and slowly march forward with the fleet of archers hammering defensive stakes into the dusty ground.

> "Bedford had won a great naval battle in 1416 but he was untested on a traditional field of battle"



5 Cavalry charge and vicious combat

French cavalrymen charge through archers on Bedford's right flank, riding on before being stopped by the bowmen in reserve. Many of the Englishmen flee, but the rest of Bedford's division smash into d'Aumale's division in furious hand-to-hand combat. Bedford is positioned in the thick of the fighting.

6 Italians loot the English laager

On the English left Salisbury is engaged in fierce fighting with the Scots. Meanwhile, 600 Italian cavalry sweep past him to plunder the laager where they start to loot the baggage. The English reserve repels the French cavalrymen before rushing to beat off the Italians in the laager.

7 English reassemble and charge

The energised English reserve now charges to help Salisbury, careering into the Scottish flank with a loud yell. Meanwhile Bedford, who has managed to beat off the French left, reassembles his own division to charge at the Scottish rear, overwhelming them in the process.

8 A vengeful slaughter

The Scots are killed almost to a man, including the Earls of Buchan, Douglas and Mar. The French flee the field with the dead including the viscounts of Aumale and Narbonne. Marshal Lafayette and Jean II, Duke of Alençon are among the captured and the English are triumphant.

as Burgundy was a semi-dependent duchy and its duke was a slippery character who changed sides depending on the political climate. This meant that the English took on the bulk of the military offensive against 'Dauphinist' French armies.

Under Bedford's leadership the English armies had continued success in France. An Anglo-Burgundian army defeated a numerically superior Franco-Scottish army at Cravant in July 1423 and Bedford then intended to build up his army for a decisive stroke against the Dauphin.

His plan revolved around strengthening Normandy's frontiers by occupying Picardy and driving French troops from key towns on the River Somme. To achieve this, Bedford laid siege to Ivry, a town 30 miles west of Paris, but the French immediately captured the Norman border town of Verneuil in August 1424. Ivry surrendered on 14 August and Bedford rushed his army to recapture Verneuil. The battle that would take place outside its walls would secure Bedford's reputation.

The 'Second Agincourt'

On 17 August, Bedford's army of approximately 9,600 men lined up across the north road out of . He arranged his army in the 'Agincourt' formation with his men-at-arms in the centre and the famous archers on the flanks. There was also a reserve of 2,000 archers who formed a laager of wagons and horses to defend the baggage train.

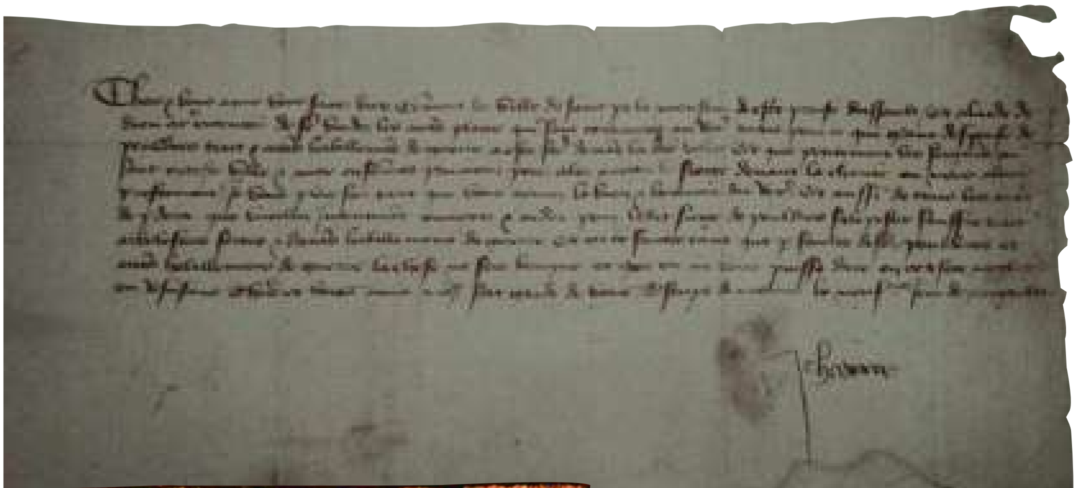
Facing the English was a 'French' army of about 14-16,000 men but 6,000 of these troops were Scottish under the command of the Earls of Douglas and Buchan. The Scots were vigorous allies of the French and had been a thorn in the side of the English for decades, and the Dauphin had even appointed Buchan as Constable of France.

Viscount d'Aumale was commanding this coalition army, but the Scots had a great degree of influence. For Bedford, the battle would be personal, as it was a Scottish force that had killed his elder brother, Thomas, Duke of Clarence, at the Battle of Baugé in 1421.

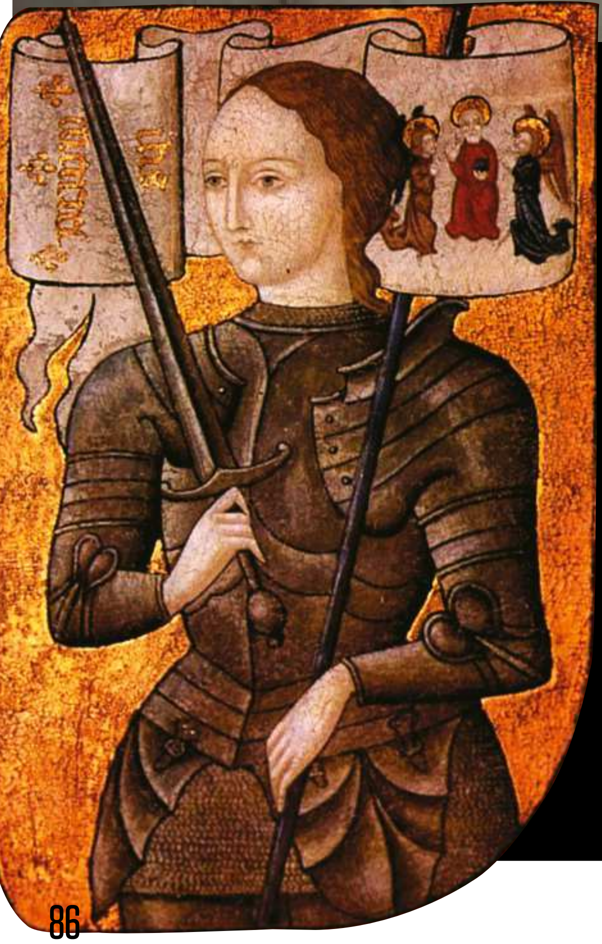
A Burgundian eyewitness, Jean de Waurin, who fought for the English, described the Anglo-Scottish enmity during the battle: "The English archers, and the Scots who were with the French, began to shoot each other so cruelly that it was horrible to look at them. They brought death with full force to those they attacked. After the shooting the parties attacked each other furiously, hand to hand."

Waurin, who had fought at Agincourt, stated that Verneuil was a more ferocious battle: "Without doubt, I have never seen a finer company where there were so many nobles showing greater appearance of wanting to fight. I saw the assembly of Agincourt, but the assembly at Verneuil was the most formidable and the best fought."

He went on to state: "This battle lasted about three-quarters of an hour, very terrible and bloody, and it was not in the memory of man to have two such mighty parties fighting for such a space of time without being able to tell to whom the loss or victory would turn…"



Joan dictated many letters to the English demanding their withdrawal from France. This particular letter is addressed to the people of the city of Riom (in the Auvergne region) in 1429



Joan of Arc: England's nemesis

The scourge of the English is one of the most famous women in history, whose short but extraordinary life has become legendary

Joan of Arc is a French national icon and one of the most curiously fascinating figures to emerge from the Middle Ages. She was a teenage peasant girl from Domrémy in Lorraine who claimed to hear divine voices telling her to expel the English from France and crown the Dauphin as Charles VII.

Remarkably, her story was believed (or used) by Charles and he allowed her to accompany a relief convoy to the Siege of Orléans carrying a holy banner and wearing a suit of armour. Joan soon energised the town and garrison into taking the fight to the English and the siege was lifted on 8 May 1429 – just over a week after her arrival. The spell of English invincibility had been broken and shortly afterwards they were driven from the Loire region in a series of sieges and battles that Joan either took part in or helped to inspire.

Following these victories Joan and her allies moved fast to crown the Dauphin as Charles VII at Reims Cathedral in July 1429, but a subsequent attack on Paris failed in September. In the spring of 1430, Burgundians captured her while she was attacking Compiégne and she was subsequently sold to the English who imprisoned her at Rouen.

At her subsequent trial she was accused of witchcraft, heresy and cross-dressing but she amazed her accusers with her spontaneous eloquence and intelligent defiance. She was burned at the stake for relapsed heresy aged only 19 in May 1431. A posthumous trial in 1456 declared her innocent and she has since become a patron saint of France.

To the victor, the spoils

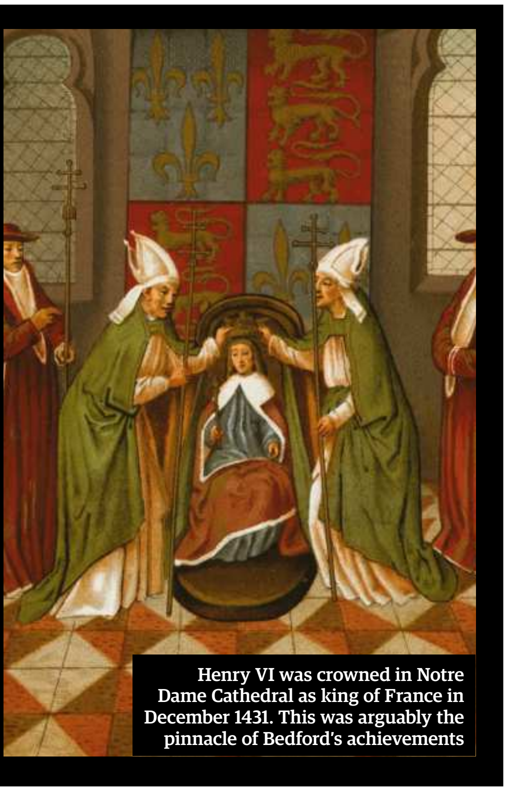
Largely thanks to his father Henry V and his uncle Bedford, Henry VI remains the only King of England to be crowned as King of France

It is commonly assumed that Joan of Arc's military successes caused the collapse of English rule in France. While this was true in the long term, it was not apparent in the early 1430s. In fact Henry VI of England was crowned in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris as King of France on 26 December 1431, months after Joan had been executed. He was only ten years old, but he had already been crowned as King of England on 6 November 1429. The ceremony was rich in symbolism for his dual kingdoms.

He was announced as, "Born by descent and title of right justly to reign in England and in France." The traditional site for crowning French kings was at Reims Cathedral but it was under hostile French occupation so Paris was the second option.

Henry arrived in Paris on a white horse accompanied by his retinue and nobles, with Bedford prominent among them. He rode under a canopy, the symbol of rank and honour, and was greeted by the prominent Parisian bishops and burghers who all wore lavish costumes. Paris was decked out with colourful symbolic shields and statues to mark Henry's arrival.

During the coronation ceremony the king was crowned by the Bishop of Winchester and the singing was apparently of a good standard. The same could not be said of the celebratory banquet, as the food that was organised by the English had been prepared three days before and was cold. In time-honoured tradition the French disapproved, with one Parisian writing, "This seemed very odd to the French."



Henry VI was crowned in Notre Dame Cathedral as king of France in December 1431. This was arguably the pinnacle of Bedford's achievements

Eventually, however, victory turned decisively for the English. As at Agincourt, the archers played a part in the success but the fighting was much more hand-to-hand and the casualties were high. The English lost 1,600 men while the Franco-Scottish army had casualties of at least 7,000. The vast majority of these were the Scots who were virtually annihilated. Two days after the battle, Bedford confirmed: "There were very few Scots who were not slain."

Contemporaries are unanimous about Bedford's leadership capabilities, with Waurin saying, "The Duke of Bedford did that day wonderful deeds of arms, and killed many a man with an axe that he held in two hands. He reached no one whom he did not fell, he was great in body and large in limbs, wise and brave in arms." The chronicler John Hardyng agreed, "The regent was there that day a lion, and fought in arms like any champion."

Unlike the battle of Agincourt, Verneuil's strategic importance was profound. The battle destroyed the Scottish army and French morale, allowing the English to push further south towards the Loire River and securing Normandy from the French for nearly 30 years.

For five years after Verneuil, the English were virtually unopposed by the French until they laid siege to the town of Orléans between 1428-29 when Bedford would first hear from his most famous foe: Joan of Arc.

The Regent and the Maid

Joan was an illiterate teenage peasant girl from Lorraine who claimed to hear voices from God telling her to liberate France from the English and helped to raise the Siege of Orléans. Her now famous 'Letter to the English' before her arrival was directly addressed to Bedford: "King of England, and you, Duke of Bedford, who call yourself Regent of France… Hand over to the Maiden (Joan) who is sent here by God, the keys to all the towns you have taken and violated in France. Duke of Bedford, the Maiden asks and requests that you will not cause your own downfall."

After the siege, French forces heavily defeated English armies and the Dauphin was crowned as Charles VII at Reims Cathedral in July 1429. The English were on the back foot for the first time in years. However, Bedford was not present at either the siege or the subsequent defeats, as he was running the English administration in Paris. He was incensed by Joan's presence and described her as, "a disorderly and deformed travesty of a woman who dresses like a man and whose life is dissolute."

After the coronation, Charles and Joan marched on Paris and Bedford went with his army to confront the French at Montépilloy in August. The two armies faced each other for two days but neither attacked, which was highly unusual for both Bedford and Joan.

Bedford refrained from attacking because his men were terrified of Joan's previous successes. On Joan's part it is recorded that she was, "perpetually changing her resolutions; sometimes she was eager for combat, at other times not." This indecision indicates that Joan did not want a repeat of Verneuil and both armies withdrew on 16 August. Joan immediately went to attack Paris but Bedford had reinforced its defence and the siege immediately failed. Joan was captured by the Burgundians in May 1430, sold to the English and burned at the stake for relapsed heresy in May 1431.

Neither of Bedford's marriages resulted in any children, but he did have a daughter out of wedlock called Mary

Bedford was the only English general that Joan never defeated, either at a siege or on the battlefield, and if he is remembered at all today it is as 'the man who burned Joan of Arc'. This is erroneous, as Joan was condemned by a largely French, pro-Burgundian ecclesiastical court, but Bedford ultimately would have agreed with their decision. The English advance into France may have stalled, but it was only when Bedford died of natural causes in 1435 that the French started to reclaim territory before finally expelling the English in 1453.

Bedford was recognised as a great man during his lifetime. In 1433 the English Parliament wrote to Henry VI saying his uncle had, "achieved many great things, especially the battle of Verneuil, which was the greatest deed done by Englishmen in our days, save the battle of Agincourt."

Even the French admired him. When Louis XI, who reigned in France between 1461-83, was asked to demolish Bedford's tomb in Rouen Cathedral he replied: "In his lifetime neither my father nor yours, for all their might, could make him budge one foot. Let his body rest. I account it an honour to have him remain in my domains".

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Joan of Arc

The teenage martyr who led the French army and put the fear of God into the English

A young woman whose faith led her to challenge kings and inspire armies, Joan of Arc's devout belief that God had appointed her to lead the French to victory against the British drove her from the village of her birth and onto the battlefield. In her brief time she became a national figurehead; a symbol. It was an image she cultivated and encouraged and one that would ultimately lead to her death.

Flames secured Joan's martyrdom, just as they provoked her fierce patriotism. Jehanne D'Arc, or la Pucelle (the Maid) as she came to be known, was born in 1412 in the village of Domrémy, located across the river from Burgundy's territory. The Burgundians, allies of the British, regularly attacked French territory. In July 1428, Joan's family fled a raid and returned to find the enemy had burned their town, fields and church. Joan had heard angelic voices since the age of 12 or 13, urging her to remain pious, but now they gave her a specific mission. The voices of Archangel Michael, St Catherine and St Margaret directed her to go into France and find her king, the Dauphin Charles.

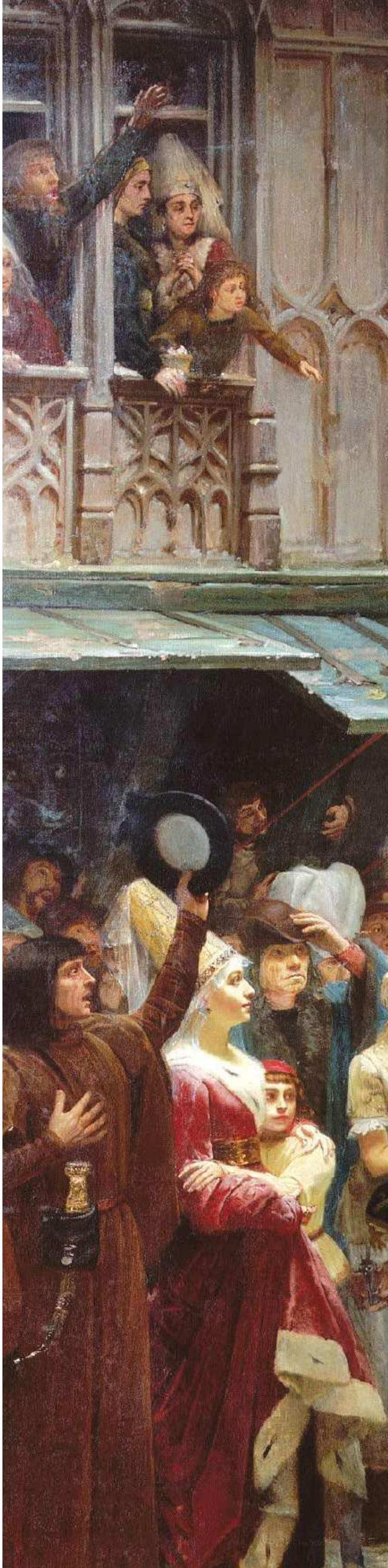
> She claimed to have her first vision at the age of 12, when St Catherine, St Michael and St Margaret appeared to her in a field

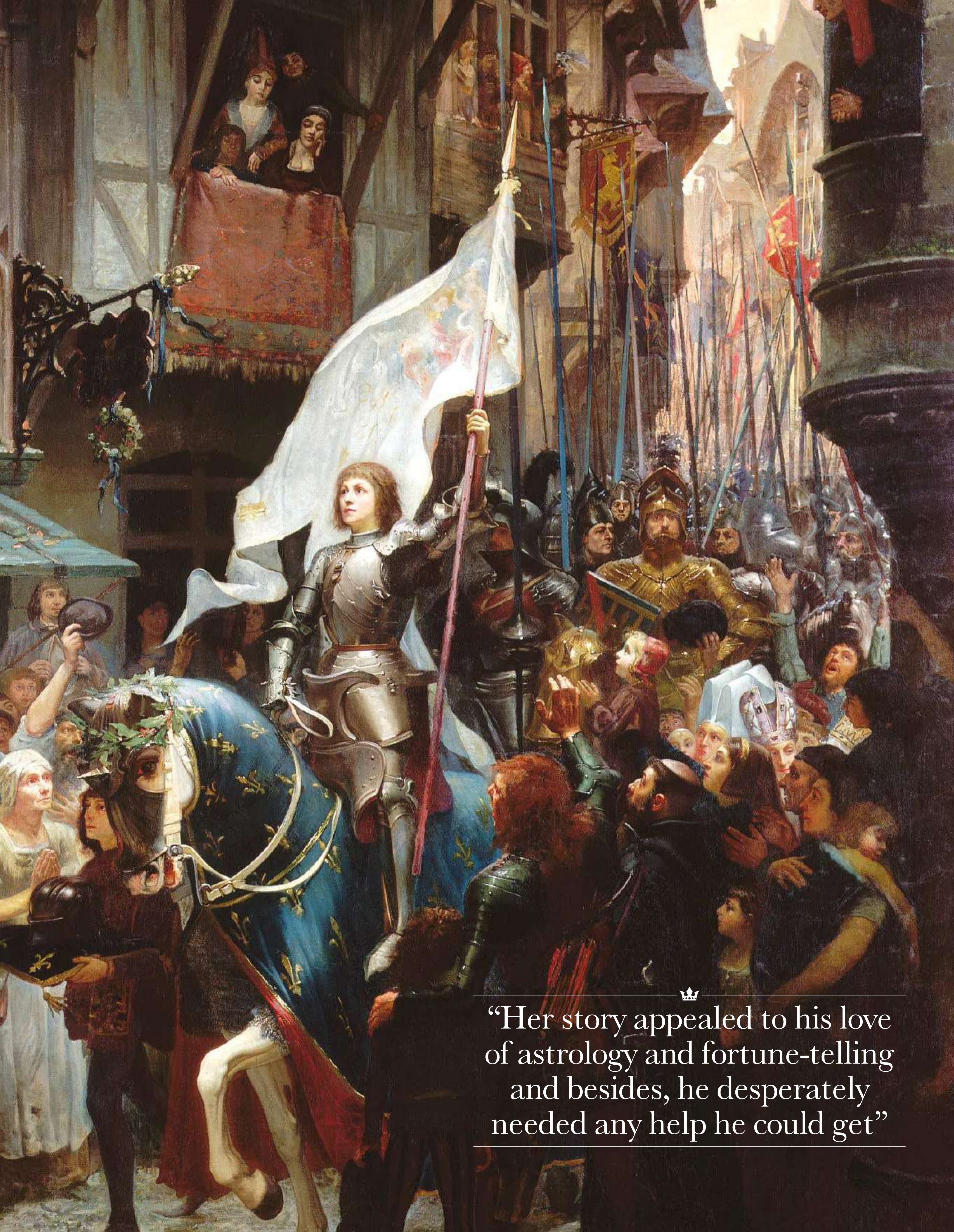
The alliance between Britain and Burgundy had kept Charles from claiming the French crown. His enemies not only occupied Paris, but also held the city of Reims, where coronations took place. The crown would have to wait, however, as the French city of Orléans was currently in the grip of a protracted siege. Orléans needed help and Joan believed she was the one to deliver it. On 13 May 1428, the sixteen-year-old arrived in Vaucouleurs and begged Robert de Baudricourt, the captain of the garrison, to give her a military escort to Charles' court at Chinon. Baudricourt replied that she should be taken home and beaten. Joan would not be deterred and returned in January the next year.

She claimed she was the subject of a prophecy from 1398, about a maid who would "deliver the kingdom of France from the enemy." Baudricourt turned her down again, but her efforts were gaining traction.

She gained favour with local nobility, particularly the Duke of Lorraine. Although Joan refused to attempt to cure his gout, the Duke agreed to give her a small escort and in February she travelled in men's clothes to Chinon, where she was presented to the court.

Charles was cautious but curious. Taking advice from a mad heretic could be devastating to his campaign, but her story appealed to his love of astrology and fortune-telling and besides, he desperately needed any help he could get. Joan immediately picked him out from the crowd and pledged her allegiance: "Most illustrious Lord Dauphin, I come and am sent from God to give assistance to you and the kingdom." He was impressed, but ordered she be tested before giving any official credence to her claims. One of the key figures in these trials was Yolande of Aragon, one of the true powers behind Charles and an intelligent strategist. After Joan's maidenhood was proved, she faced questions from clergy and theologians and passed with flying colours. Whether or not they truly believed in her voices was irrelevant. Charles now had a messenger of God, and Yolande raised a convoy for this messenger to lead.



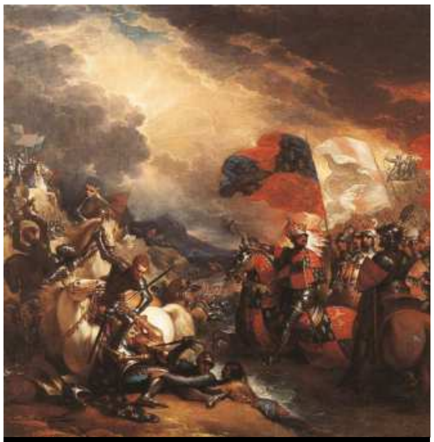


“Her story appealed to his love of astrology and fortune-telling and besides, he desperately needed any help he could get”

The Hundred Years' War, 1337-1453

After William the Conqueror defeated Harold at Hastings in 1066 and claimed the English throne, English and Norman territories were combined. It was inevitably difficult to keep control of the taken land. By the reign of English King Edward III in 1327, only Gascony and Pontieu remained. When the French King Charles IV died heirless, Edward believed his mother and Charles' sister Isabella was the next in line, meaning the crown should be his. The French disagreed and chose Charles' cousin Philip. A furious Edward refused to pay homage and when Philip confiscated his lands in Aquitaine in retaliation, Edward declared war.

The Edwardian era of the Hundred Years' War lasted until 1360. The English captured Philip's successor, King John II, but a compromise wasn't reached until the Treaty of Brétigny, in which Edward agreed to abandon his claim in exchange for Aquitaine and Calais. War resumed in 1369 when Charles V of France responded to Edward the Black Prince refusing his summons by declaring war. Charles successfully reclaimed many of the territories his predecessor lost, and the Black Prince's son Richard II would make peace with Charles VI in 1389. After the truce had been repeatedly extended, war resumed in 1415 when Henry V invaded, leading to decades of conflict during which the English would take Paris and claim kingship. They would not be driven out until the Battle of Castillon in 1453, the official end of the Hundred Years' War.



Edward III, one of the instigators of the Hundred Years' War, crosses the Somme

In April 1429, Joan rode out, holding her white standard and wearing a suit of armour commissioned by Charles. She announced that her sword would be found in the church of Sainte-Catherine-de-Fierbois, hidden behind the altar. It was an old gift to the church from the crusades, and the discovery was treated as a miracle. Her pious conduct became renowned; she forced her soldiers to stop taking the Lord's name in vain and expelled prostitutes from their camps. She dictated letters to the British, instructing them to leave France or face the wrath of God. A canny propagandist, the Dauphin ensured these letters were copied and widely distributed.

However, Joan was still an untested military leader. She arrived at Orléans eager for battle but had not understood that her forces were there as support, nothing more. Although frustrated, she managed to get her men into the city, past the English troops and was rewarded with the adulation of the citizens. They may have been pleased to see her, but her impatience to attack was at odds with her fellow commanders' strategy. In her frustration she even hurled insults at the English from the battlements.

When an attack was decided upon on 4 May 1428, Joan was not even told by the commanders and woke up as the fight was in progress. She arrived just in time to rally her troops and inspire them to capture their target: the small fortress of Saint-Loup. It was their first victory and Joan's confidence grew. She dictated a fearsome final letter to the English, ordering them to leave, and on 6 May another attack was mounted. Joan led the attack herself, routing the enemy. She advanced again the next day, claiming to be the first to storm the ramparts at Les Tourelles, where she took an arrow to the shoulder but stayed in the fight. The French commanders credited her for inspiring the troops to victory. Orléans hadn't just been relieved; the English had been routed.

With Orléans free, Joan wanted Charles to proceed immediately to Reims but the Dauphin was more cautious. He wanted to clear the Loire valley and began raising money for the campaign. It would be a month before Joan would see combat again. Technically, the

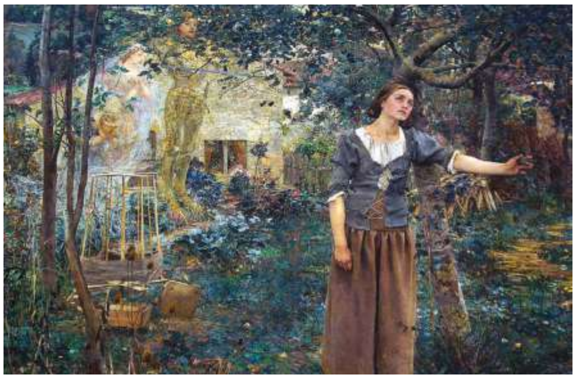
> Joan sent many letters to British and Burgundian troops but she was illiterate and had to dictate them

> "She dictated a fearsome final letter to the English, ordering them to leave, and on 6 May another attack was mounted. Joan led the attack herself, routing the enemy"

Defining moment

First vision 1424

At just 12 or 13 years old, she first claims to hear the voices of angels speaking to her. At first, the voices tell her to 'govern' her conduct. If she felt she had not behaved properly, the voices would admonish her. They also tell her to reject the marriage her family had arranged for her. Joan soon identifies the main voice as Michael, the archangel who led the battle against Satan in the Book of Revelation. As Joan grows older, Michael's messages continue to advise her toward piety, but gradually grow more political. Finally, Michael and the other voices, those of St Catherine and St Margaret, tell her to travel to France and begin her mission.



Timeline

1412

- **Birth of a warrior**
  Joan is born to a farming family in the town of Domrémy. She never receives formal education or learns how to read and write, instead learning about religion from her mother Isabelle.
  1412

- **Domrémy burns**
  The territory across the river from Domrémy is Burgundian, and a raid into French territory proves a defining moment for Joan. Her family flees to Neufchateau and returns to find the enemy having burnt their town.
  1428

- **Journey to Vaucouleurs**
  In 1428 Joan's voices tell her to travel to France and talk to the Dauphin, Charles. She travels to Vaucouleurs to demand an escort, beginning a series of attempts ending in success after convincing nobles that she is the fulfilment of a prophecy.
  May 1428

- **Audience with the king**
  Joan is granted a meeting with the Dauphin, Charles, who sees value in her for his military campaign to free Orléans. Joan immediately identifies him in a room full of people and impresses him with her fervour.
  6 March 1429

- **The sword is found**
  After convincing the clergy and theologians of her maidenhood and her gift, Joan is allowed to lead a force to Orléans. She announces that her sword can be found in the church of Saint Catherine-de-Fierbois, which it is.
  April 1429

young Duke of Alençon led the army but he was a firm believer in the young female warrior and frequently deferred to her. They swept quickly through the English resistance and laid siege to Beaugency. The English surrendered without realising a relief force was on its way, a force the French promptly set off after. They met at Patay on 18 June, where the ill-prepared English were decimated, with over 2,000 dead and all but one senior officer captured. Joan played little part in it but by this point that mattered not, as her legend only grew stronger. By now, Charles was ready to head for Reims and the coronation. He led a grand procession, entered the city on 16 July and was crowned the next day as Joan looked on proudly. She was desperate for the king to attack Paris but he chose to leave Reims instead, only to be barred from crossing the Seine by English troops. Joan was ecstatic as she saw the only possible answer was an attack on Paris.

> Joan dressed in men's clothes, claiming the spirits told her to. She also wore her hair short, but this is often not depicted in portraits

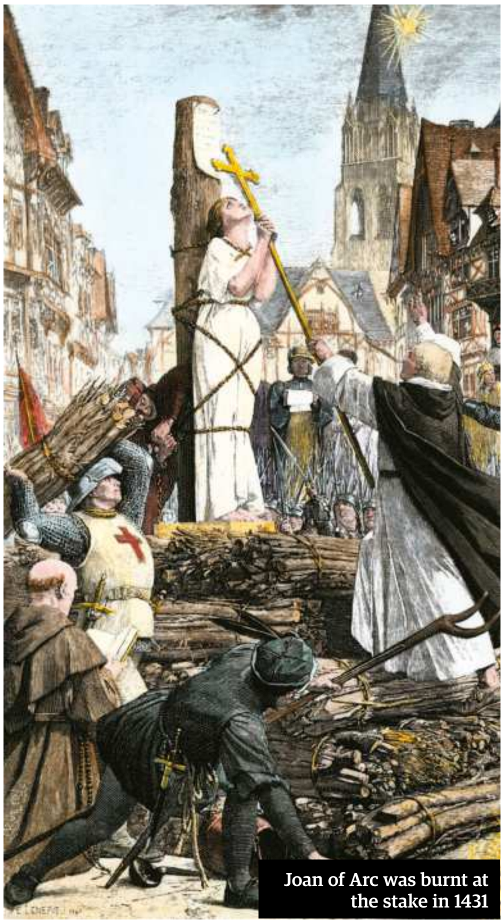
After skirmishes throughout August and a truce with Burgundy, on 8 September Joan finally led the Paris attack she has been itching for. She stood on the moat, demanding surrender, but the only reply she received was an English arrow through her leg. After hours of constant bombardment, her men reached her under the cover of darkness, but she was determined to continue the fight the next day. However, once Charles saw the number of French casualties he ordered her to return to his side.

The attack had failed and Joan's usefulness was now suddenly cast into doubt. She needed a victory to restore her reputation but in November 1429 failed to take the castle of La Charité after a long siege. On return to court, Charles gave her hereditary nobility but made sure she stayed with him, which frustrated Joan. It was her duty to be on the battlefield expelling the enemy from her home soil, not rotting in court.

By 1430, the English were preparing a full-scale invasion of France to reclaim their recently lost territory. When the city of Compiègne refused to surrender, Joan rode to support them without Charles' authorisation. On 23 May she led an attack from the city, but the English reinforcements cut her off at the rear and she could not retreat. She was pulled from her horse and forced to surrender to the Burgundians. She testified that constant sexual harassment was the reason she remained in men's clothing, while the voices in her head told her not to escape. She leapt from the tower but was injured in the fall and recaptured.

The English needed to make an example of Joan and the Parisian theologians wanted to try her for heresy, idolatry and witchcraft. She needed to answer for the way in which she had circumvented the church by claiming to receive her instructions from her 'voices' while her ability to inspire followers had to be stopped. If she were convicted by a foreign power the damage to Charles' reputation would be severe, so the French court paid the Duke of Burgundy £10,000 for her.

Six rounds of questioning took place between 21 February and 3 March 1431, with nine more between 10 and 17 March, conducted in her cell. Joan never changed her story. On 24 May, she was taken to the scaffold and told that if she did not abjure, she would be given to the secular authorities that would carry out her death sentence. Joan wavered as the sentence began to be read out. In front of the crowd, she recanted and was sentenced to life imprisonment and to wear women's clothes.

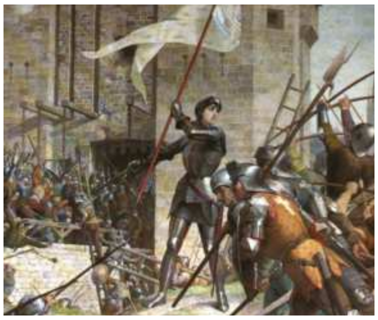

Joan of Arc was burnt at the stake in 1431

Two days later Joan changed her mind. Demanding she be allowed to attend mass, Joan was found in men's clothes, claiming the voices had told her that her abjuration was treason. Now the only possible outcome was her execution. On 30 May she was allowed to make her confession and take communion before she was taken to the Old Market in Rouen and tied to the stake. She was given a small crucifix and a Dominican priest held a parish cross high so she could see it even as the flames began to lick around her. The young warrior who had led her country to such great victories over the English cried out, "Jesus!" repeatedly before leaving this world. The king she had helped crown, Charles VII, not once tried to help Joan throughout her ordeal. She was merely a tool that had stopped being useful. However, the legend of Jehanne la Pucelle only grew stronger with time. In 1456, after a lengthy investigation, the sentence was annulled and in 1920, Joan of Arc was canonised by Pope Benedict XV.

Defining moment

Siege of Orléans 29 April-8 May 1429

Joan arrives at Orléans amid great fanfare from the citizens of the city but is met with indifference by her fellow commanders. She is determined to mount an attack as soon as possible but is told they would wait for a relief effort. She is so poorly regarded by the other generals that when a sortie takes place, she's not told beforehand. Instead, she races out and joins the attack just in time to rally the flagging troops, ultimately claiming a fortress. This will be the first in a series of victories that would liberate Orléans and confirm her status for many as a heaven-sent heroine.



Charles is crowned
After swiftly clearing the Loire region of English resistance, Charles finally travels to Reims where he is crowned King Charles VII of France. The coronation fulfils another part of the prophecy of Joan's voices.
17 July 1429

A failed siege
Following Charles' coronation, Joan is convinced that Paris will fall. However, the siege fails as 1,500 men fall to the English bombardment, with Joan herself wounded, having to be pulled from the battlefield under nightfall.
8 September 1429

Capture
While leading an unsanctioned relief effort of Compiègne, Joan decides to attack the Burgundian troops surrounding the city. She is cut off by the English and pulled from her horse while trying to escape.
23 March 1430

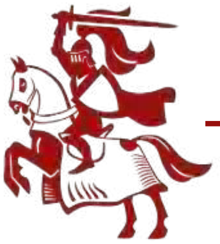
Trial
Needing to regain superiority, the church interrogates Joan, telling her she can abjure or face a secular court that will execute her. She retracts her statement, only to change her mind days later, stating she'd rather die than deny what she knows to be true.
9 January-24 May 1431

Burned to death
Having recanted her abjuration, Joan is sentenced to be burned at the stake. A Dominican priest holds a cross up high enough for her to see from the flames. She calls out "Jesus!" several times as she burns to death.
30 May 1431

1456

Late justice
Charles orders that Joan's trial be investigated, a proceeding taking roughly six years to complete. Finally, in 1456, the original verdict is annulled, deciding the process had been unjust.
1456

© Alamy, Corbis, Getty Images



Wars & Invasions

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Find out how a siege required innovative tactics and determination

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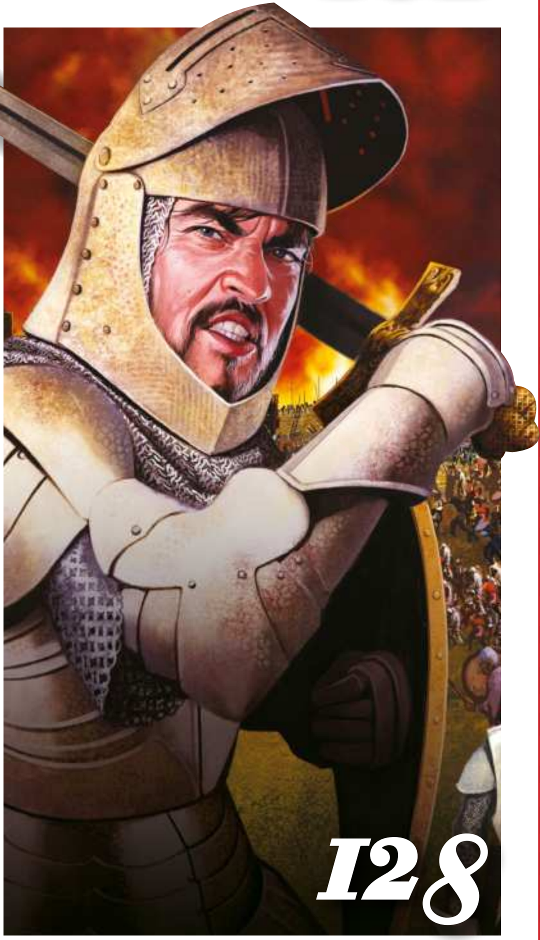
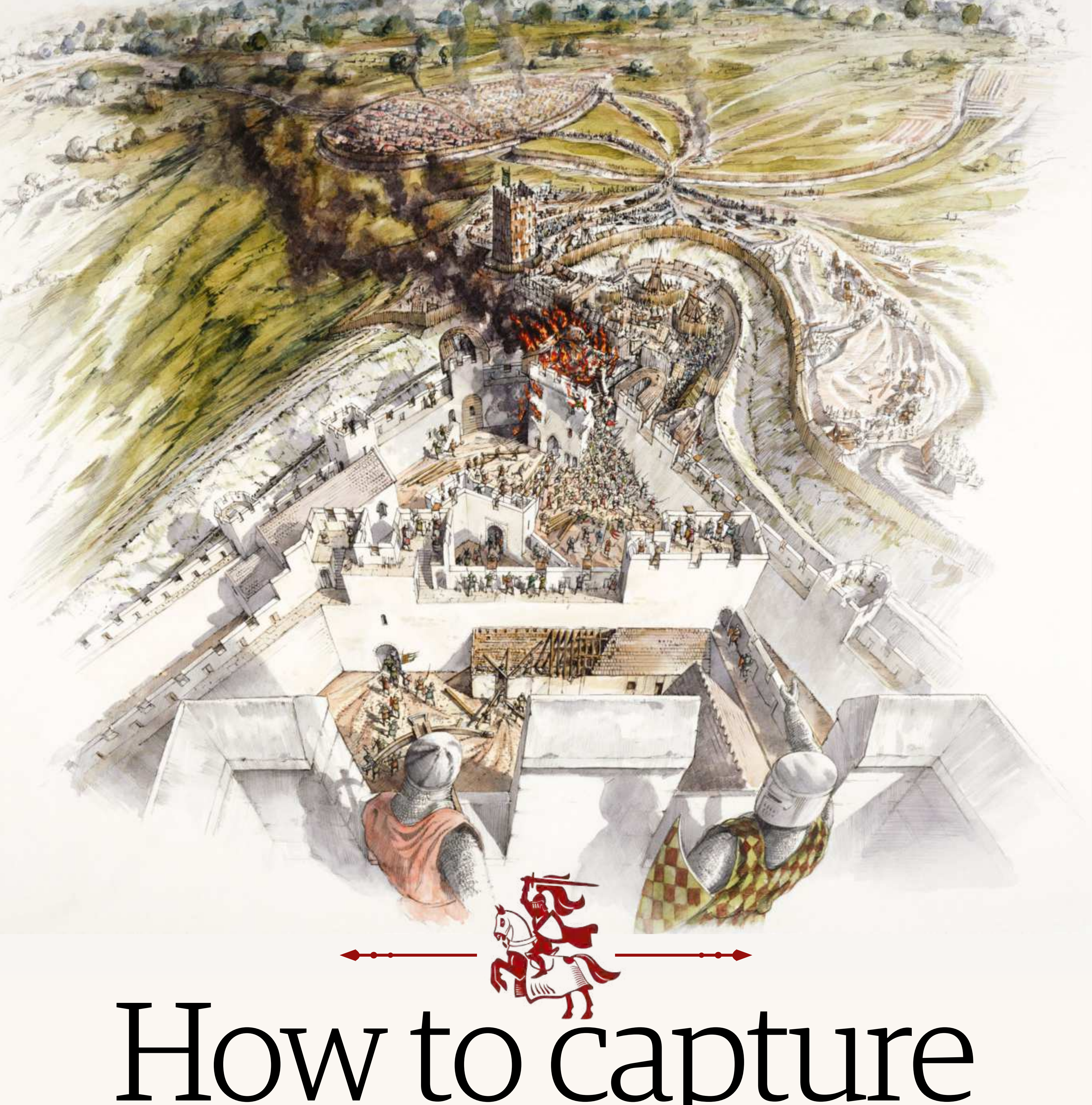
Knights rode horses into battle and formed the cavalry. This is what they trained their whole lives for





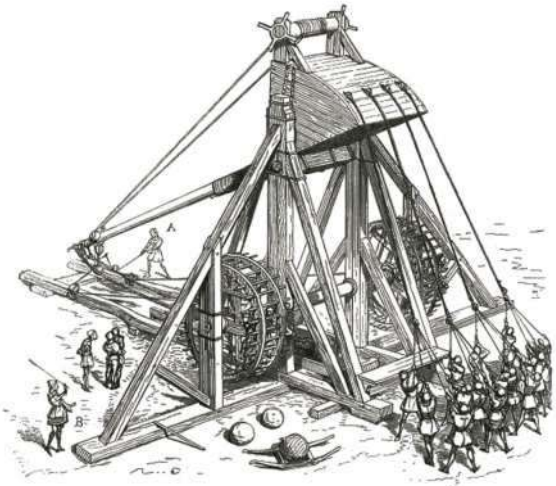
How to capture a Medieval castle

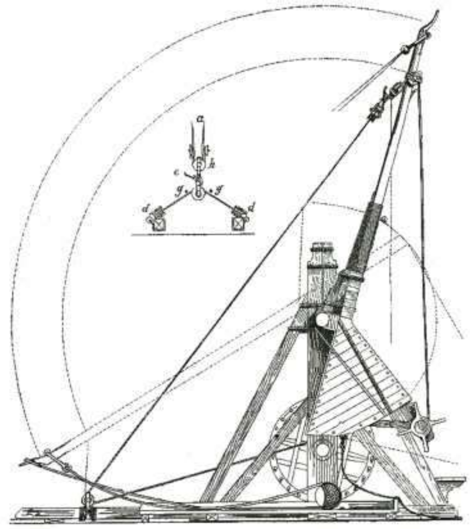
From demolishing walls to starving out defenders, a siege in the Middle Ages required innovative tactics, stamina and determination

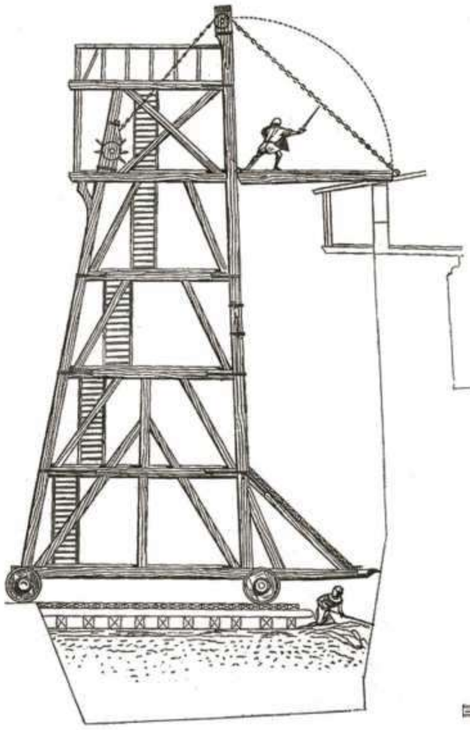
Castles were the power bases of the Medieval world. Occupied by kings, nobles and knights, defeating one of these strongholds wasn't easy. To successfully bring one down, a solid strategy was a must. First, the attacking force would need to occupy the surrounding lands to instil fear in the castle owners. If negotiation and diplomacy failed, an attacking force could resort to intimidation by seizing supply lines and pillaging the locality. If a white flag was still not forthcoming, the siege would officially begin. Prior to an attack, a messenger would sometimes be sent to the besieged castle, informing defenders of the force's intentions. After this notice was heeded, the castle would be restocked with weapons and provisions, ready to weather the coming storm.

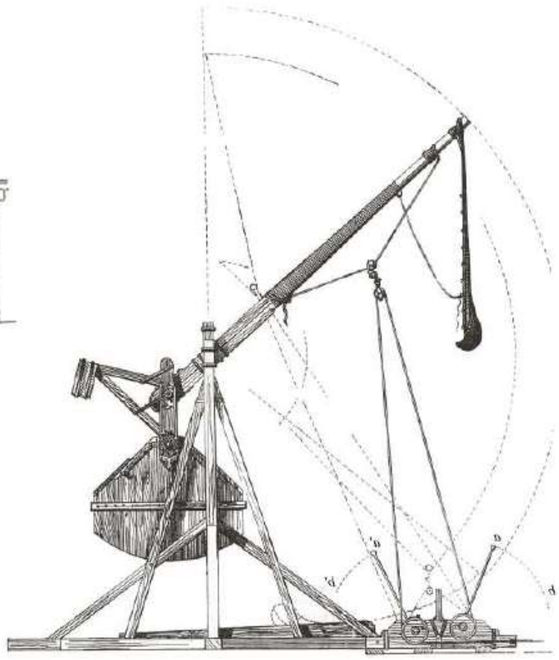
There were many ways to try and break down the fortifications. An expensive yet destructive method was the use of huge wooden siege engines. Ranging from long-range trebuchets to metal-capped battering rams, a castle could be assaulted from all directions. The best carpenters, blacksmiths and engineers were drawn from around the land to create the machines of war while knights who owed service provided the military muscle. Livestock, timber, tools and provisions would also be acquired. A camp was set up a safe distance from the castle and preparations would begin.

Meanwhile, the defenders made preparations of their own. Usually, a scorched-earth policy was implemented. This would deprive the surrounding area of any arable land to plunder, significantly depleting an advancing army's available resources. This involved doing major damage to the defenders' own land, but it was worthwhile if it helped prevent a siege. Inside the castle, men would be armed and stores restocked in anticipation of what was to follow. Sieging a castle was an imposing and frightening prospect and required inventive strategies, plentiful resources, a steely determination and a hefty slice of luck. Ready your mangonels and prepare for battle.









Five bloody Medieval sieges

A selection of the largest, longest and most destructive sieges from across the Middle Ages

Jerusalem 1099

Jerusalem is one of the most sieged cities in history, and in 1099 it experienced one of the bloodiest too. Part of the First Crusade, the Muslim and Jewish population was massacred as the Crusaders burst through the gates, and suffering very heavy losses themselves.

Acre 1189-91

After negotiations failed, Saladin besieged the Crusader stronghold of Acre during the Third Crusade. The siege lasted a total of 23 months and resulted in many Crusader deaths, but Saladin was defeated and dealt a serious blow in his attempt to retake the Crusader kingdom.

Chateau Gaillard 1204

The impressive defences of this French castle were eventually brought down by King Phillip after eight months of battle. The siege included almost every type of siege engine and was fought on both land and sea against the fortress.

Rochester 1215

Part of the First Barons' War, the siege of Rochester was an example of attackers digging under a castle. A fire fuelled by pig fat was started underneath the battlements and the defenders eventually surrendered as winter set in.

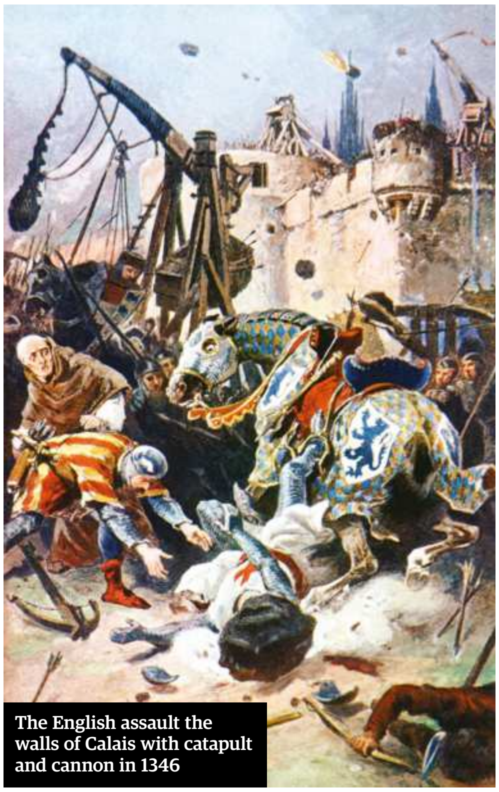
Cahir 1599

The most impregnable castle in the whole of Ireland, the Earl of Essex laid siege to the fortress under the orders of Queen Elizabeth I. It quickly succumbed to artillery, demonstrating how the advent of the cannon helped end the age of the Medieval castle.

Choose your weapons

With money to burn and a realm to conquer, barons would splash out on the biggest and best siege engines available

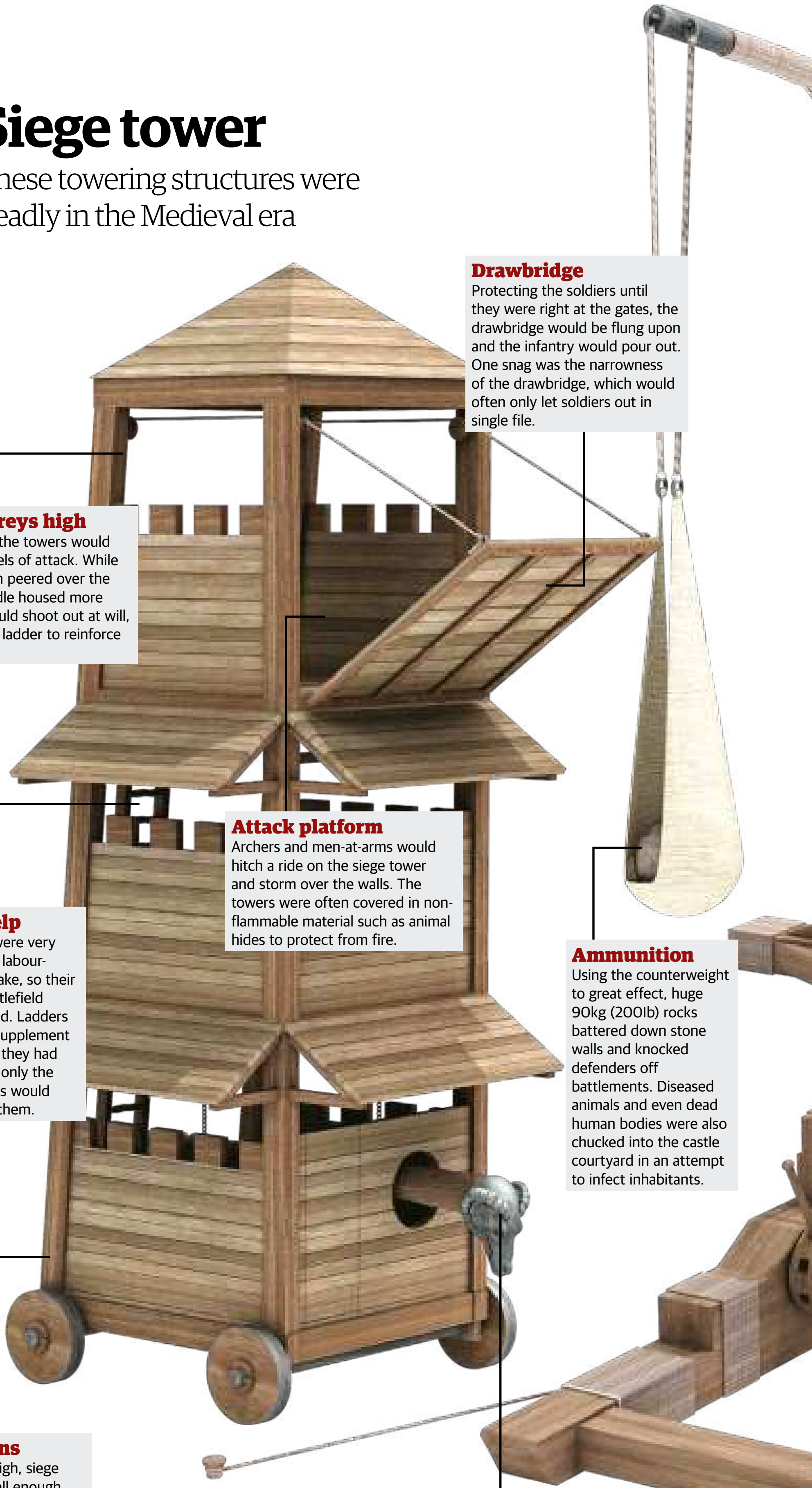
For the best possible chance of victory during a siege in the Middle Ages, huge siege engines were financed to bring death and destruction upon a fortress and its inhabitants. These imposing machines rumbling into view could even frighten castles into submission before an arrow was nocked. Different siege engines were useful against different types of castles, so commanders would purchase what they needed depending on the terrain and defences they were going to face. As castles were often built with sieges in mind, many were surrounded by moats and steep climbs. It was also important to take a range of siege engines to keep the attack varied and relentless. For example, siege towers could soak up arrows and keep the defenders at bay while trebuchets and battering rams did damage to other parts of the stronghold. To ensure their machines would last and be as effective as possible, barons would source the best builders and tools to create their wooden army.



The English assault the walls of Calais with catapult and cannon in 1346

Siege tower

These towering structures were deadly in the Medieval era



Drawbridge
Protecting the soldiers until they were right at the gates, the drawbridge would be flung upon and the infantry would pour out. One snag was the narrowness of the drawbridge, which would often only let soldiers out in single file.

Three storeys high
The largest of the towers would have three levels of attack. While the top section peered over the walls, the middle housed more troops who could shoot out at will, and also had a ladder to reinforce the top level.

Attack platform
Archers and men-at-arms would hitch a ride on the siege tower and storm over the walls. The towers were often covered in non-flammable material such as animal hides to protect from fire.

Ladder help
Siege towers were very expensive and labour-intensive to make, so their use on the battlefield could be limited. Ladders were used to supplement towers, but as they had no protection, only the bravest soldiers would dare climb up them.

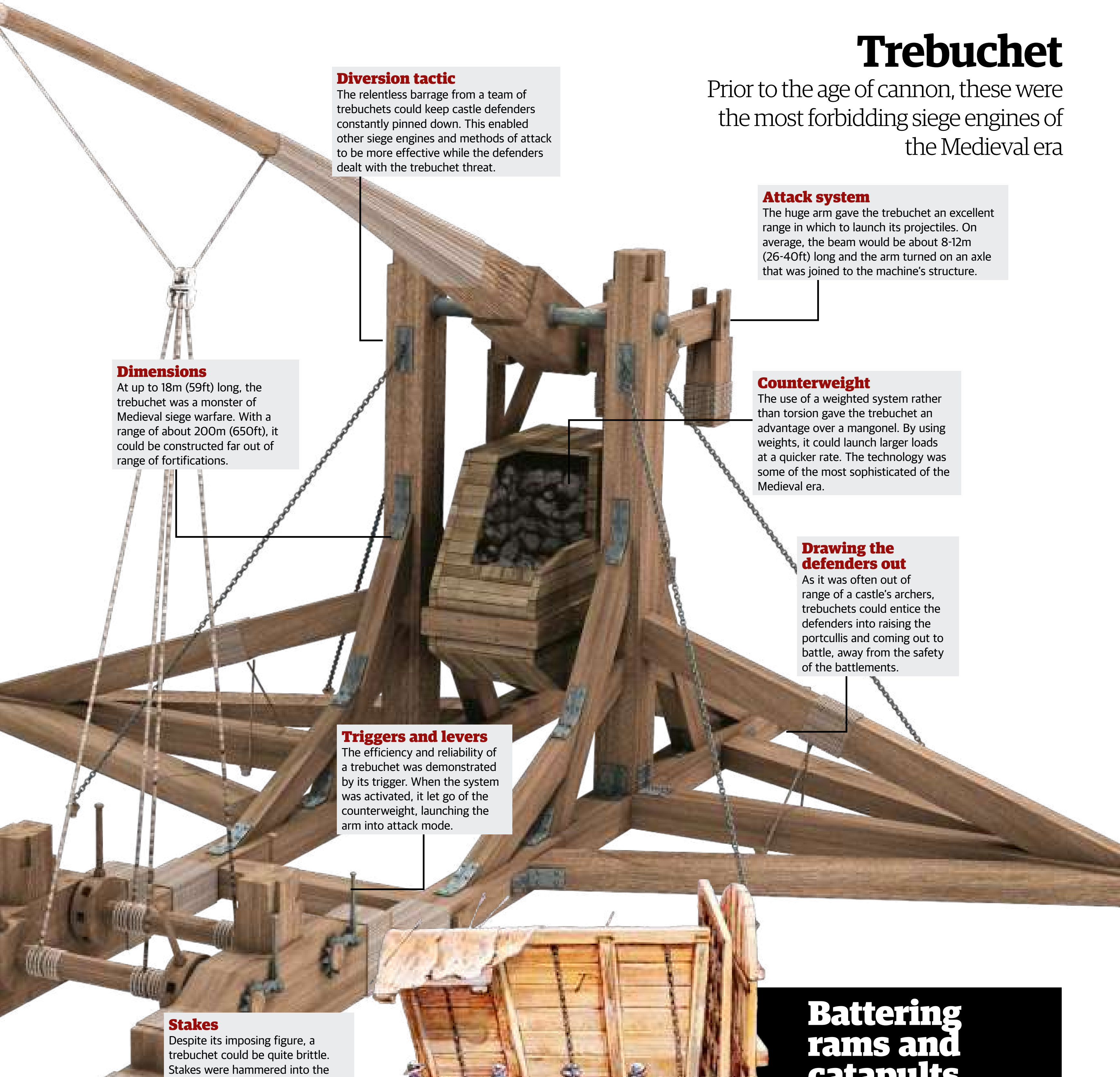
Ammunition
Using the counterweight to great effect, huge 90kg (200lb) rocks battered down stone walls and knocked defenders off battlements. Diseased animals and even dead human bodies were also chucked into the castle courtyard in an attempt to infect inhabitants.

Dimensions
At 8m (26ft) high, siege towers were tall enough to rise over most castle defences. In response, many fortifications dredged moats or were constructed on the top of a hill to nullify their effectiveness.

Battering ram
As well being effective weapons on their own, battering rams could be housed within a siege tower. Now covered and part of a larger mechanism, the ram would bring down gates and walls while troops attacked the top of the battlements.

Trebuchet

Prior to the age of cannon, these were the most forbidding siege engines of the Medieval era



Diversion tactic
The relentless barrage from a team of trebuchets could keep castle defenders constantly pinned down. This enabled other siege engines and methods of attack to be more effective while the defenders dealt with the trebuchet threat.

Attack system
The huge arm gave the trebuchet an excellent range in which to launch its projectiles. On average, the beam would be about 8-12m (26-40ft) long and the arm turned on an axle that was joined to the machine's structure.

Dimensions
At up to 18m (59ft) long, the trebuchet was a monster of Medieval siege warfare. With a range of about 200m (650ft), it could be constructed far out of range of fortifications.

Counterweight
The use of a weighted system rather than torsion gave the trebuchet an advantage over a mangonel. By using weights, it could launch larger loads at a quicker rate. The technology was some of the most sophisticated of the Medieval era.

Drawing the defenders out
As it was often out of range of a castle's archers, trebuchets could entice the defenders into raising the portcullis and coming out to battle, away from the safety of the battlements.

Triggers and levers
The efficiency and reliability of a trebuchet was demonstrated by its trigger. When the system was activated, it let go of the counterweight, launching the arm into attack mode.

Stakes
Despite its imposing figure, a trebuchet could be quite brittle. Stakes were hammered into the ground to prevent it falling or lifting when fired. It would have to be well protected as one direct hit could break the whole mechanism.

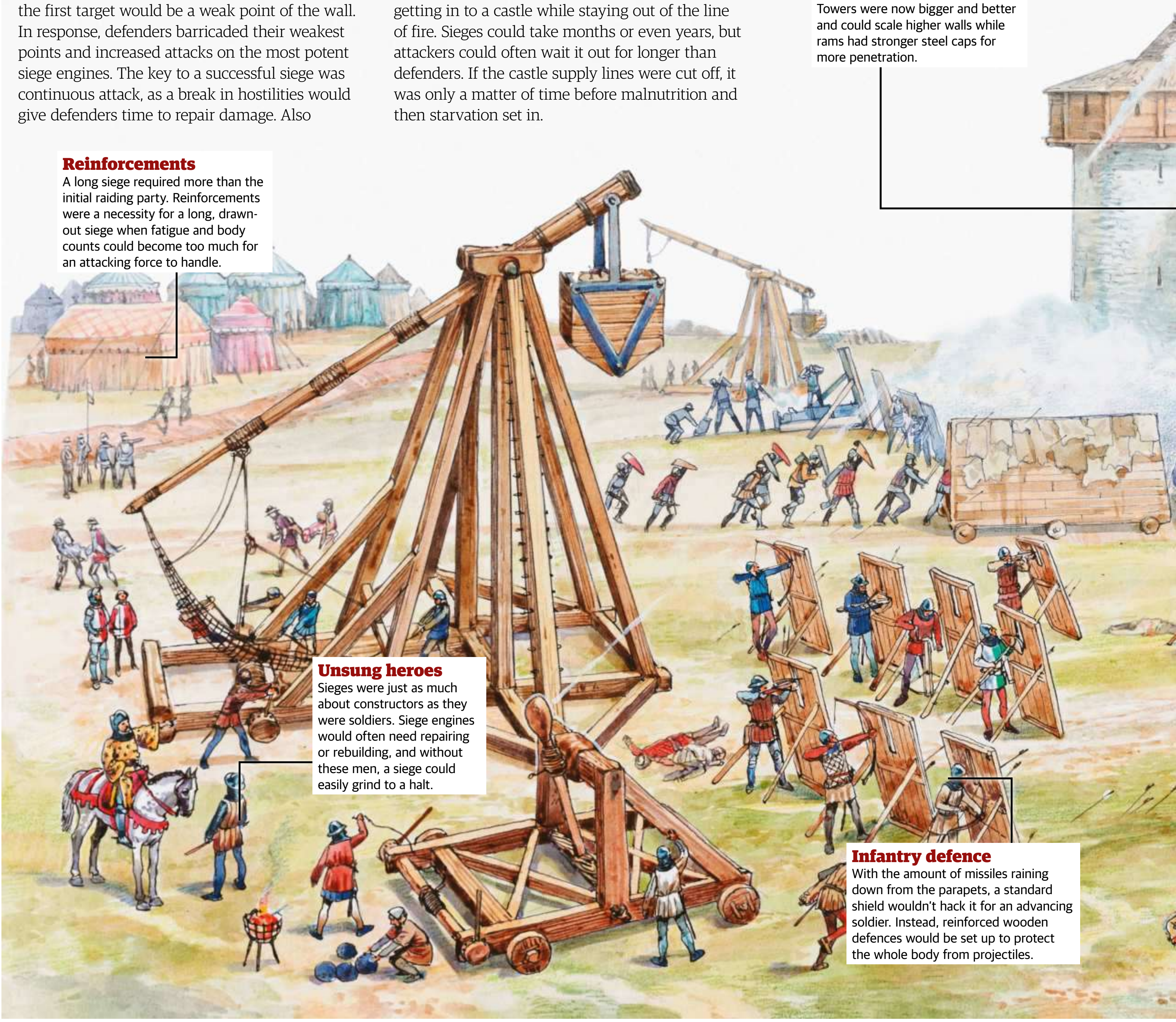
Battering rams and catapults

Better known as a mangonel, the catapult was an update of the Roman onager, which used torsion technology to fling projectiles. Perhaps the most primitive of all siege weapons, the battering ram was also very effective. Used to pound down walls, the wooden stake was often steel capped and could be part of a larger mechanism.

Launch the attack

When negotiations failed and intimidation proved futile, siege was the only option

Getting a siege under way wasn't just a matter of loading up the engines and firing the first projectile. Depending on the forces available and the layout of the castle, each attack would begin differently. Most of the time, though, attackers would first attempt psychological warfare by launching severed heads into the castle. Then, the first target would be a weak point of the wall. In response, defenders barricaded their weakest points and increased attacks on the most potent siege engines. The key to a successful siege was continuous attack, as a break in hostilities would give defenders time to repair damage. Also essential was stopping supplies reaching the castle, preventing the arrival of weapons and resources. If the breakthrough still didn't come, aggressors would spread out their attacks. Castles were often undermanned, so attacking from all angles could overwhelm them. If this still didn't work, it was time to get creative. Mining was a common way of getting in to a castle while staying out of the line of fire. Sieges could take months or even years, but attackers could often wait it out for longer than defenders. If the castle supply lines were cut off, it was only a matter of time before malnutrition and then starvation set in.

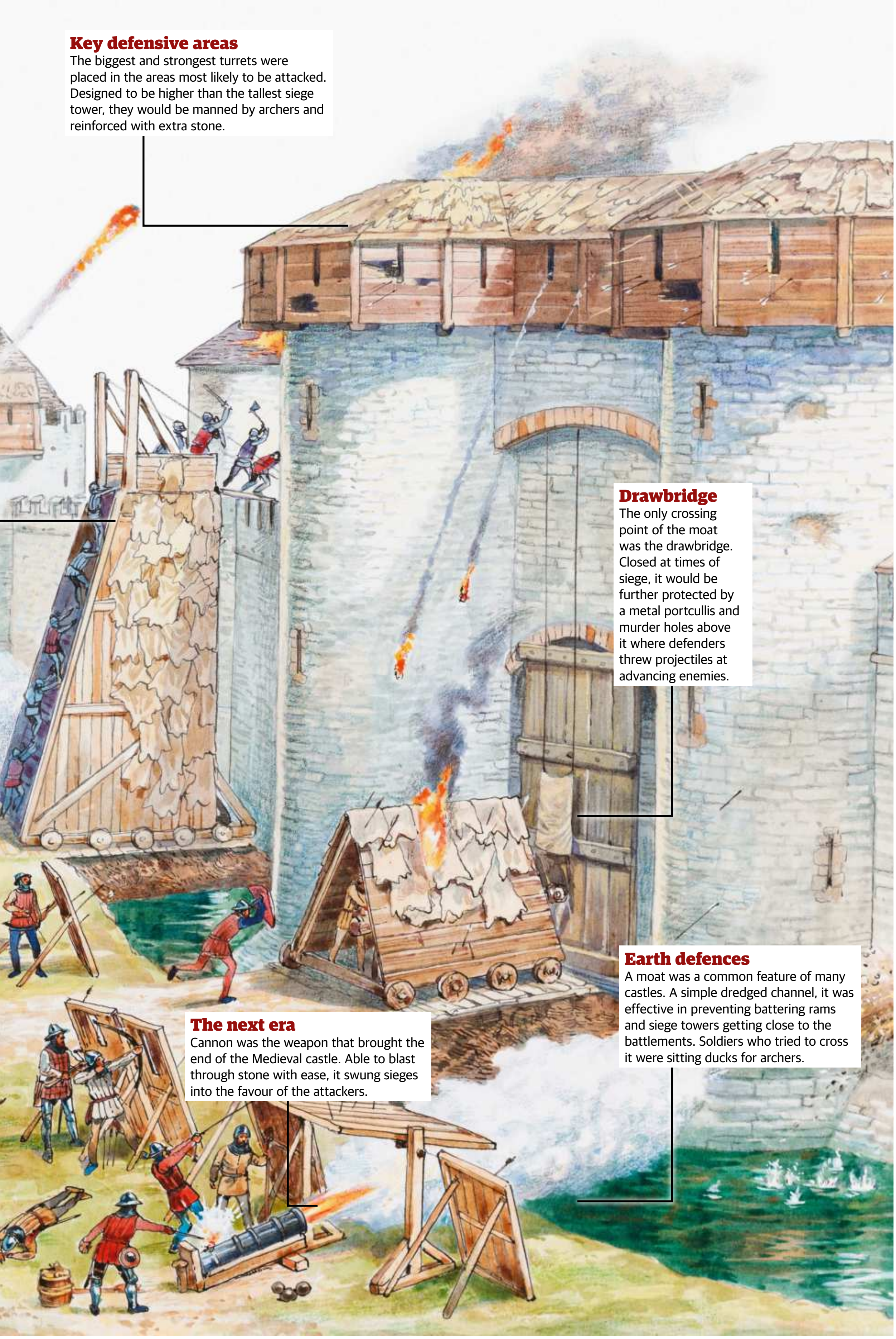


What have the Romans ever done for us?
Both battering rams and siege towers were first used in the ancient era but had been substantially improved on by the Middle Ages. Towers were now bigger and better and could scale higher walls while rams had stronger steel caps for more penetration.

Reinforcements
A long siege required more than the initial raiding party. Reinforcements were a necessity for a long, drawn-out siege when fatigue and body counts could become too much for an attacking force to handle.

Unsung heroes
Sieges were just as much about constructors as they were soldiers. Siege engines would often need repairing or rebuilding, and without these men, a siege could easily grind to a halt.

Infantry defence
With the amount of missiles raining down from the parapets, a standard shield wouldn't hack it for an advancing soldier. Instead, reinforced wooden defences would be set up to protect the whole body from projectiles.



Key defensive areas
The biggest and strongest turrets were placed in the areas most likely to be attacked. Designed to be higher than the tallest siege tower, they would be manned by archers and reinforced with extra stone.

Drawbridge
The only crossing point of the moat was the drawbridge. Closed at times of siege, it would be further protected by a metal portcullis and murder holes above it where defenders threw projectiles at advancing enemies.

Earth defences
A moat was a common feature of many castles. A simple dredged channel, it was effective in preventing battering rams and siege towers getting close to the battlements. Soldiers who tried to cross it were sitting ducks for archers.

The next era
Cannon was the weapon that brought the end of the Medieval castle. Able to blast through stone with ease, it swung sieges into the favour of the attackers.

How to defend a castle

When the attackers were on your doorstep, these measures could get you out of trouble

◆

Look for spies

Prior to a siege, spies were often sent out to report on a castle's frailties. To prevent a Trojan horse-like attack, castle rulers would keep close tabs on who and what was entering and leaving their gates.

Ripples in the water

Underground, some of the most vicious fighting of the entire siege was fought in tunnels. If defenders lost here, their perimeter would be compromised, so guards would place a pot of water near the walls that rippled when miners were below.

Specialised battlements

Castle walls, built with attack in mind, were littered with anti-siege measures. Arrow loops gave archers a good shot at attackers while towers and gatehouses were constructed as troop garrisons. A barbican passage at the entrance would act as a death trap to oncoming foes.

Retreat to the keep

When the outer walls were breached, a strong keep was essential. The centrepiece of a castle, if the keep was surrounded, the only chance would be to hold on until help arrived and hope the food didn't run out.

Allied assistance

If an assaulting force was preoccupied with a siege, it would be vulnerable to attack from the rear. Any distraction would relieve the pressure and allow a counter-attack to vanquish the enemy once and for all.

What to do with the enemy

After defeat, what was left of the defenders had to be dealt with

Take prisoners

The defenders would eject women and children out of the keep. This cruel tactic gave the attackers prisoners to be used as a bargaining tool for surrender, but now only the best fighters remained with a much larger food supply.

Total annihilation

A popular method of ending a siege was killing all that stood in the way. Sometimes the nobility were held for ransom but, like at the siege of Bedford Castle in 1224, everyone could be killed as a warning to others.

New tenants

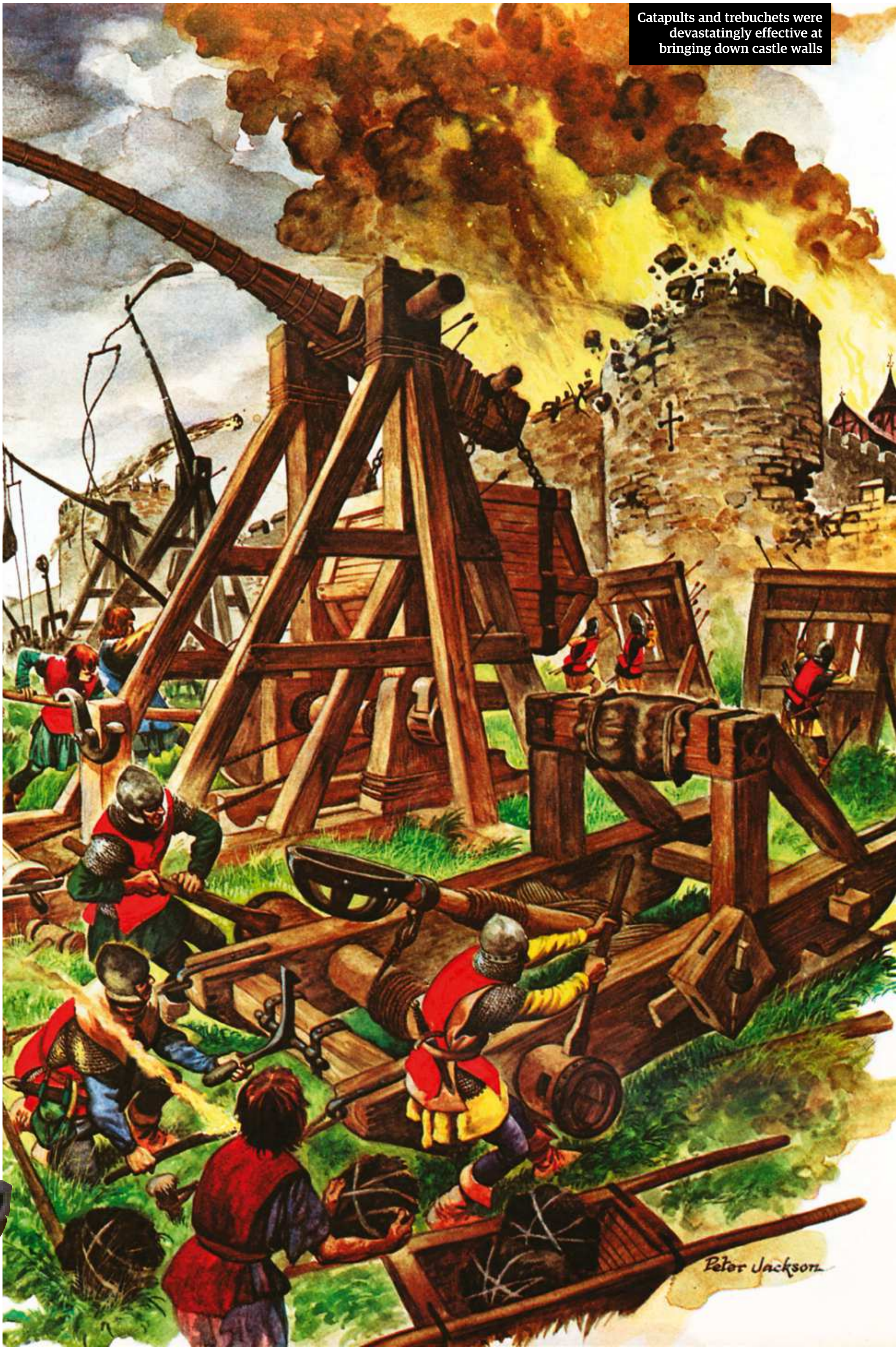
If the castle was in a strategic location or was an influential power base, the invading army would take it. It would act as an outpost on the frontier of a land and the former defenders would be exiled or enslaved.

It's a trap!

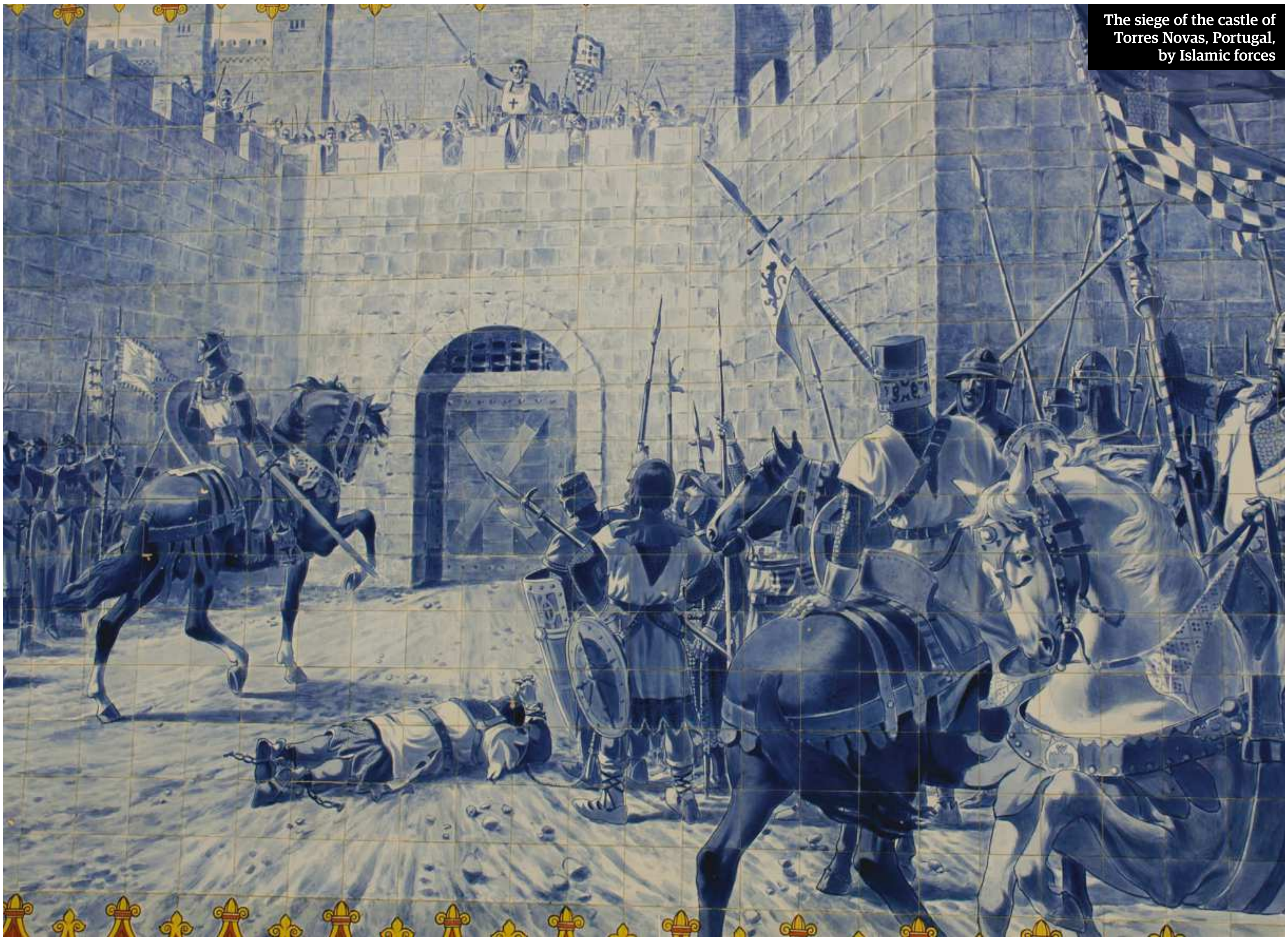
Defenders of a castle would implement all types of booby traps. These would be left for the new occupants to find for themselves and sometimes it was done the hard way. Using a captured prisoner would be a good tactic.

Raze to the ground

The advent of cannon made castles much easier to demolish. For many castles, the English Civil War was their last hurrah but they still proved valuable, such as when Stirling Castle held out against the Jacobites a century later.



Catapults and trebuchets were devastatingly effective at bringing down castle walls



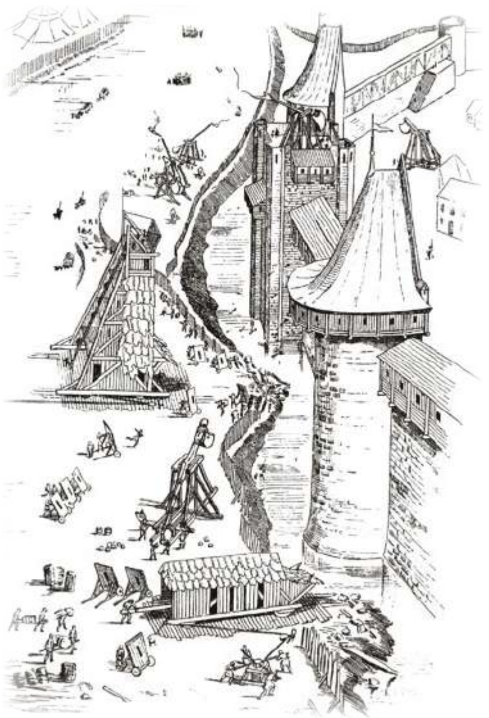
The siege of the castle of Torres Novas, Portugal, by Islamic forces

Take the castle

With the outer walls down, it was time to storm the courtyards and break into the keep

When the walls were overrun and bodies lay strewn around the bailey, the keep, the centrepiece of the castle defences, was the only thing that stood in the way of victory. Some keeps were merely the central building, but many had defences of their own. They could contain arrow loops and crenellations to help with the last-ditch defence of the castle. As the attacking soldiers gathered in the bailey, they would be vulnerable to arrow fire. Only plate armour stood any chance against the power of a crossbow bolt, so soldiers with chain mail would be in danger until the keep was breached. The keep would also contain the castle's stores, so in the event of a siege, the population were best placed to try to hold out for as long as possible. With the keep the only structure now occupied by the defenders, the attackers could benefit from controlling the other buildings in the castle. The armoury could be pillaged for extra weapons and tools, and after the siege ended, stores could be raided and horses taken from stables to bolster the army for the next assault. The defence of the keep was always a last resort and usually meant victory for the aggressors.

Once the castle was taken, it was up to the attackers to decide the fate of the castle ruler; this depended on how merciless they were. When the enemies had all been dealt with, there was a choice to be made: rule the castle and make it the centre of a new occupied kingdom, or raze it to the ground and let the ruin stand as an example of what happens when a castle puts up resistance. Either way, the next siege is most likely not too far away. Pack up your trebuchets!



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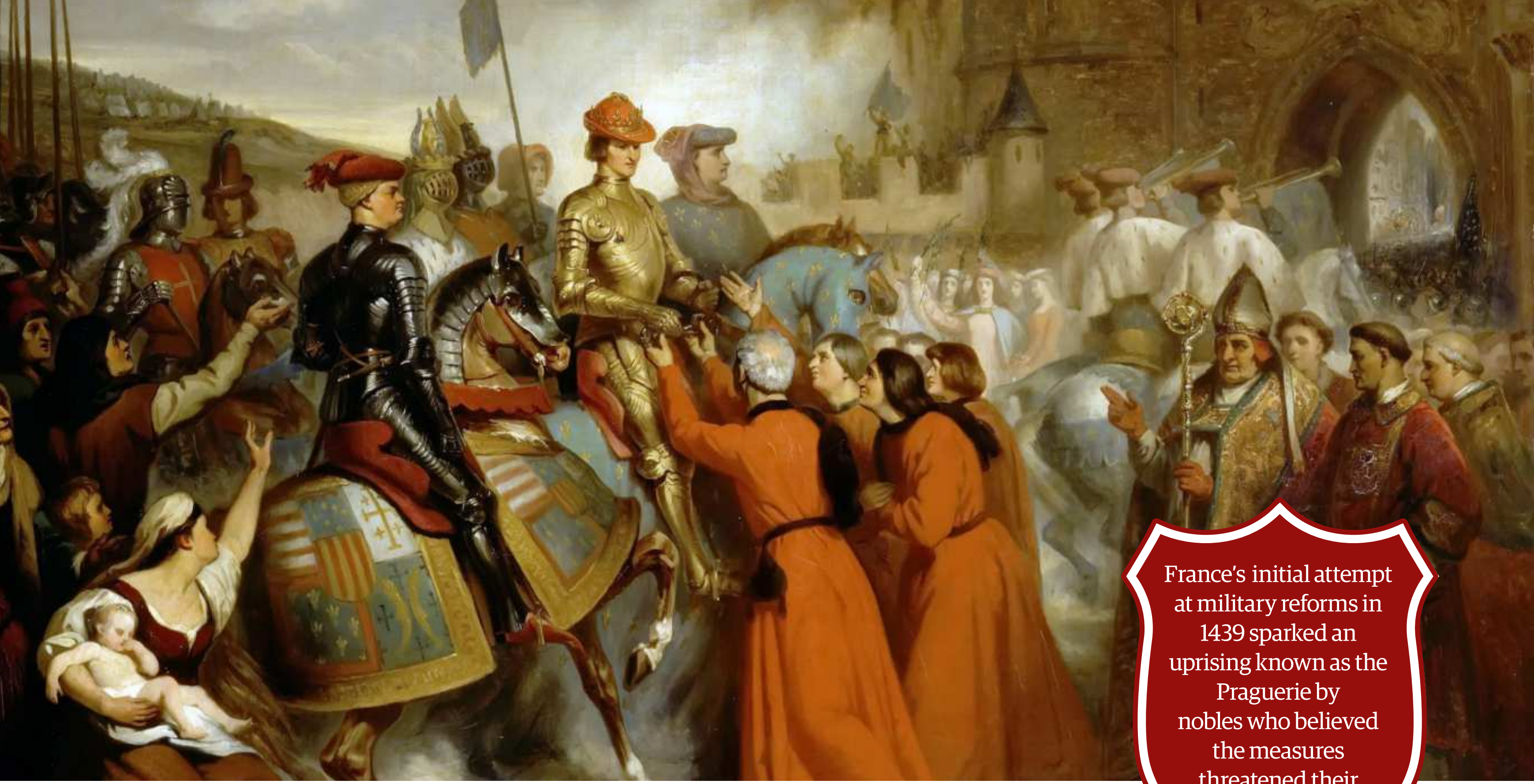


France's initial attempt at military reforms in 1439 sparked an uprising known as the Praguerie by nobles who believed the measures threatened their hereditary rights

France's revamped army

French military reforms enacted in 1445 led to the creation of a well-trained standing army unmatched by the English

For three days in October 1449, a mob loyal to Charles VII held sway in Rouen, the capital of the duchy of Normandy. A large French army had bivouacked outside the city and King Charles made his quarters at the monastery of Saint Catherine beyond the walls on the eastern side. After an attempt by the French army to gain entry failed, the mob took matters into its own hands and flung open the gates to the royal army. The English fell back to the citadel. After agreeing to surrender, the English were allowed to march to Caen.

King Charles rode victoriously into the city with his personal bodyguard of 600 horsemen following proudly behind him. The cavalrymen belonged to the newly constituted standing army established by a royal decree of 1445 that established compagnies d'ordonnance as the core of the French royal army. Each horseman carried a spear to which was attached a pennon of red satin with a gold sun. Charles had every confidence that his formidable army would enable him to retake Normandy and Gascony from the invading English.

The catalyst for the creation of the compagnies d'ordonnance can be traced back to the Treaty of Brétigny of 1360 that resulted indirectly in the proliferation of independent bands of mercenaries who preyed on the population of France. In the parlance of the times, these bands of unemployed troops were known as routiers or écorcheurs. They extorted money through protection payments and pillaged town and countryside alike. The result of their depredations was a general distrust among the commoners of the king's army. The bands of unemployed and former soldiers became a curse of great proportion and one in need of a comprehensive remedy.

For Charles VII, the problem had been acute since the liberation of Orléans in 1429. The French crown needed loyal, disciplined troops. The king had traditionally fielded troops by calling up feudal levies and hiring mercenaries and foreign troops. But the lawlessness exhibited by unemployed mercenaries during times of peace or military truce, as well as the need to exert greater control over the aristocratic class, made it imperative that the crown develop a better approach to recruiting and retaining royal forces.

In the wake of the Truce of Tours in 1444, King Charles issued a key reform measure on 5 January 1445 known as the compagnies d'ordonnance. This body of military reforms led directly to the establishment of a nascent standing army composed of royal cavalry loyal only to the monarch. The measures described that the companies were to be composed of lances fournies and prescribed how they were to be paid, to whom they reported, and who was responsible for them.

Charles stood to reap tangible benefits from a standing army. He would have a force composed of veteran cavalry that was well-equipped and highly mobile. In return, the commoners would have an army that would refrain from injustices and protect them from all manner of brigands.

The reforms set forth in the compagnies d'ordonnance restricted military recruiting to the king and authorised representatives, thereby ensuring that the monarch was the only individual within the realm who could to wage war. This helped neutralise the threat from powerful aristocrats with their own armies. The reforms also included provisions outlining the obligations and responsibilities of the provinces and localities vis-à-vis the standing army. They would fund, equip and billet the royal troops.

Constable Arthur de Richemont oversaw the establishment of the first royal companies. He reviewed the existing troops employed by the crown with an eye towards purging the army of unqualified and undesirable men. Individuals and units that had experience and the proper equipment were retained, while those who did not meet minimum standards were dismissed.

The crown instituted a means by which the troops could receive regular pay, thus giving them a strong reason to refrain from pillaging - the provinces paid them through a mix of payment in kind and cash.

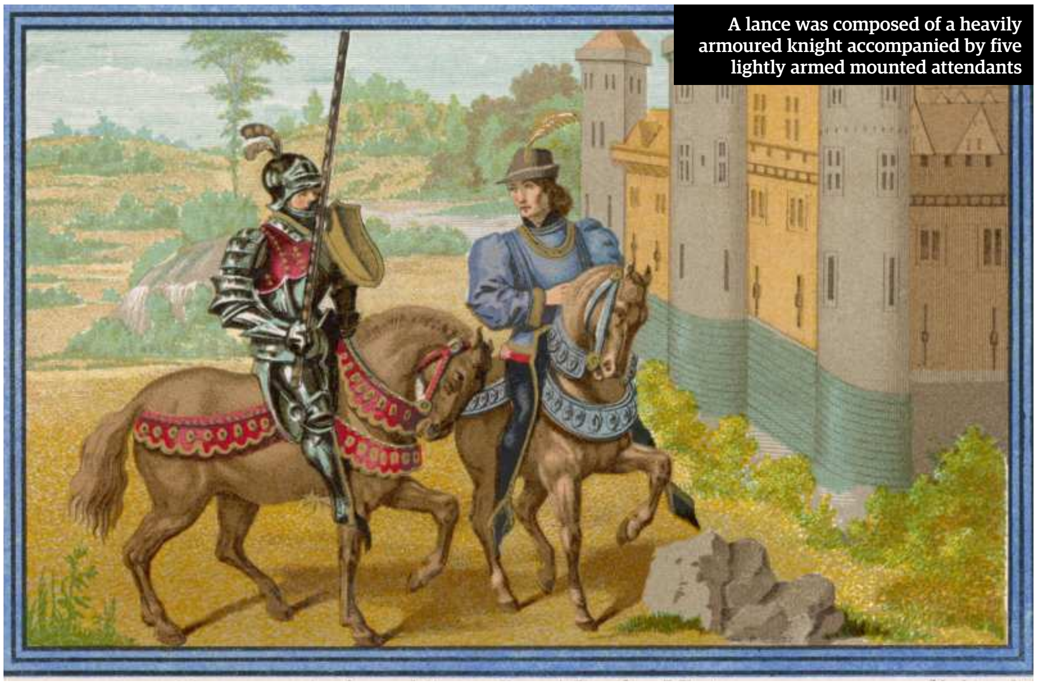
To maintain the standing army it was necessary to expand the bureaucracy associated with the royal army and so the crown hired commissioners, comptrollers and treasurers to oversee the taxation of the local jurisdictions responsible for maintaining the companies. Constables and marshals also conducted regular musters and inspections to ensure the men serving in the army were of high quality.

In 1448, the Estates General passed an additional reform establishing "franc-archers" as the king's infantry. The franc-archers functioned in many respects like traditional feudal levies, but new standards were issued regarding recruitment, training and payment.

At the same time as Charles was working to improve the cavalry and infantry, he also chose to take steps to elevate the artillery. Major technological advances in gunpowder and artillery in the 15th century made it imperative that the French royal army had the best equipment that money could buy at the time. The king retained two brothers, Jean and Gaspard Bureau, as his agents of the crown and put them in charge of purchasing any high-quality bombards and smaller guns that they should need.

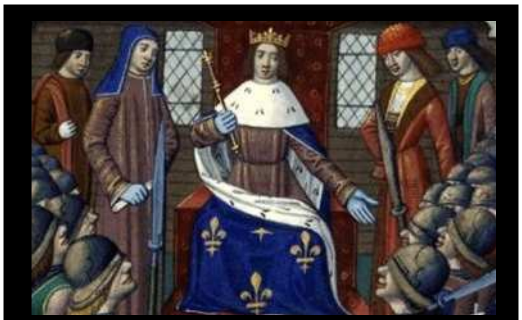
The reforms that created France's standing army were of an administrative and political nature and not of an innovative tactical nature. While they didn't change the way in which the cavalry or infantry fought, they did introduce standards that enhanced the quality of the troops. The reforms did make the king's army much more effective and capable of striking with great speed and force, as was demonstrated in the campaigns in Normandy and Gascony.

The establishment of the compagnies d'ordonnance was the single most important reform of Charles VII's reign. Enhancements to all three branches of the military resulted in an unstoppable army during the final phase of the Hundred Years' War, enabling Charles VII to drive all English forces from French soil, except for those remaining in Calais.



A lance was composed of a heavily armoured knight accompanied by five lightly armed mounted attendants

"The reforms did make the king's army much more effective and capable"



A new breed of soldier

Charles VII undertook military reforms that led to the creation of uniform cavalry and militia in service of the crown

The ordinance of 1445 created royal companies of cavalry composed of 100 lances fournies. As specified in the regulations, a lance consisted of six mounted men: one man-at-arms, one squire, two archers, a page and a valet. The crown initially raised 15 companies, totalling 9,000 men, who formed the nucleus of the French standing army. Additional companies of cavalry were added to the army in subsequent years.

In 1448, the crown issued an ordinance creating and governing a force of militia infantry known as franc-archers. Unlike cavalry companies that were billeted throughout the country, the franc-archers remained in their homes. They were exempt from the taille (land) tax and were supposed to supply their own armour and weapons – if they were too poor, these were to be provided by their parish. The formula was that every 50 households or hearths should furnish one archer and one crossbowman.

The franc-archers trained and drilled weekly and as the system matured, it was expanded to include pikeman, handgunners and crossbowmen.

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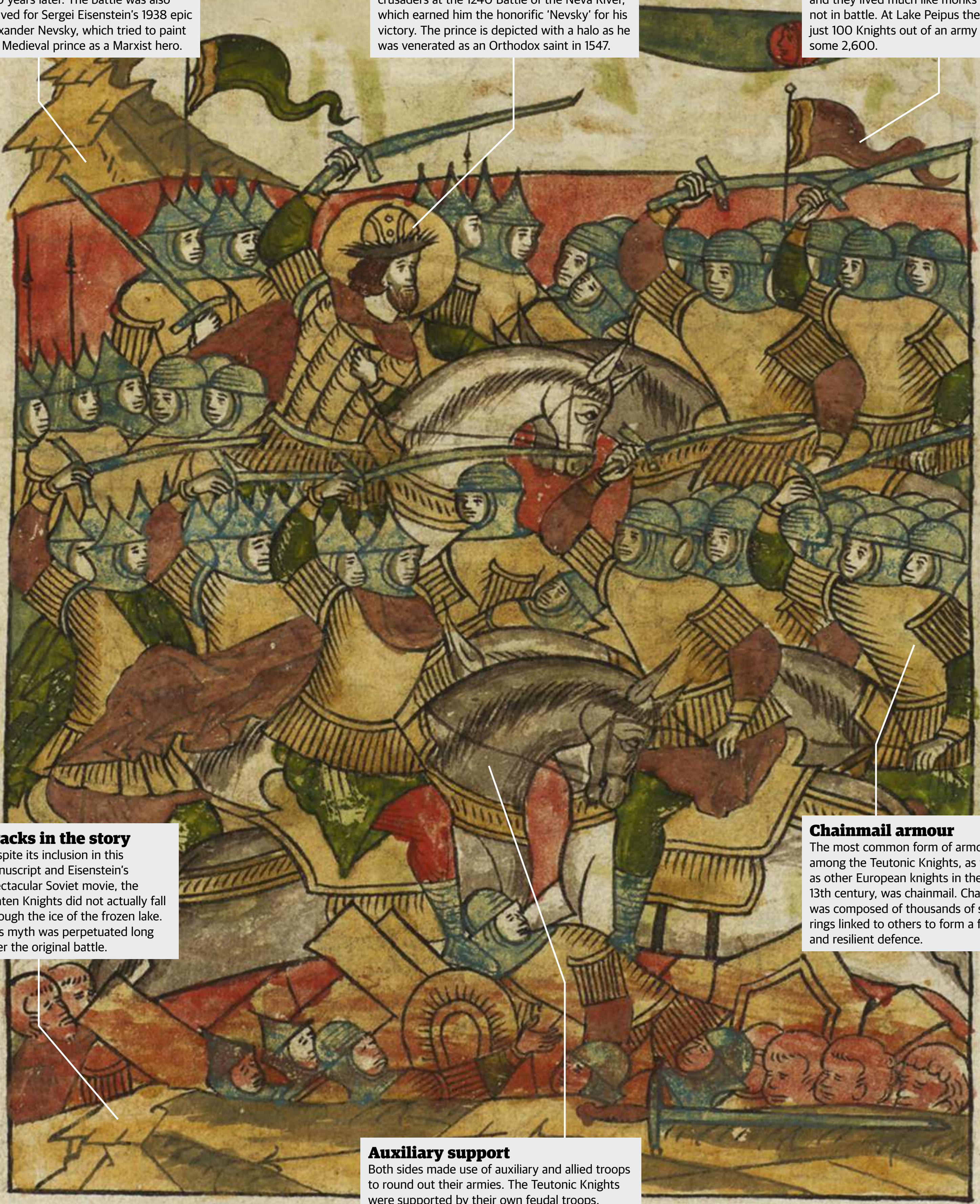


National legend

This depiction of the Battle on the Ice was from the illuminated manuscript *Life of Alexander Nevsky* produced during Ivan the Terrible's reign over 300 years later. The battle was also revived for Sergei Eisenstein's 1938 epic Alexander Nevsky, which tried to paint the Medieval prince as a Marxist hero.

Holy warrior

Prince Alexander Yaroslavich Nevsky leads the charge against the Northern Crusaders. Alexander is remembered as a great military leader, having already defeated Swedish crusaders at the 1240 Battle of the Neva River, which earned him the honorific 'Nevsky' for his victory. The prince is depicted with a halo as he was venerated as an Orthodox saint in 1547.

Crusader knights

The core of the Crusader army was made up of the Livonian Order of the Teutonic Knights. The Knights accepted only German noblemen into their ranks and they lived much like monks when not in battle. At Lake Peipus there were just 100 Knights out of an army of some 2,600.

Cracks in the story

Despite its inclusion in this manuscript and Eisenstein's spectacular Soviet movie, the beaten Knights did not actually fall through the ice of the frozen lake. This myth was perpetuated long after the original battle.

Chainmail armour

The most common form of armour among the Teutonic Knights, as well as other European knights in the early 13th century, was chainmail. Chainmail was composed of thousands of small rings linked to others to form a flexible and resilient defence.

Auxiliary support

Both sides made use of auxiliary and allied troops to round out their armies. The Teutonic Knights were supported by their own feudal troops, which included German and Danish knights as well as Estonian auxiliaries. Alexander's force included Novgorod's militia, Finns and nomadic steppe archers.

Battle on the Ice

As two armies met on a frozen lake, the Teutonic Knights of Livonia faced off against Russian soldiers with grave consequences

Novgorod, a wealthy trading city of northern Russia, was set in the midst of an incredibly hostile world. To the east lay the vast Mongol Empire, which had arisen suddenly in the Far East and swept westward, crushing all opposition before it. The hard-riding Mongols had only recently smashed a Russian army at the Battle of the Kalka River in 1223, and had thrown much of Russia under the yoke of a harsh tributary system.

To the north were hostile Swedes, and to the west, along the shores of the Baltic Sea, were the expanding territories of the Catholic German order of the Teutonic Knights. The order had originally been established in the late 12th century to crusade against Muslim forces in the Holy Land but with the passage of time, it had switched its focus to northeastern Europe. Under the overall direction of a Hochmeister, or Grand Master, the zealous Teutonic Order ruthlessly battled the pagan Prussians and Lithuanians of the Baltic region as well as the Christian, but Orthodox, Russians.

> The Teutonic Order was made up of professional soldiers and played a vital part in defending the region of Livonia

Though never numerous, the knights – who were all drawn from the German aristocracy – were superb armoured cavalrymen and demonstrated a discipline on the battlefield unsurpassed elsewhere in contemporary Europe. Clad in a white surcoat blazoned with a single cross of jet black and worn over armour, the Teutonic Knight was just as much a monk as a soldier, being celibate and adhering to a strict, monastic way of life. Personal possessions were few, even when counting weapons.

However, while the individuals may have lived frugally, the Teutonic Order itself was very wealthy. It had substantial endowments in many parts of Europe to fund its military activities. Also, whenever the Knights conquered Baltic lands, German colonists were quick to follow. These settlers were taxed, further enriching the Order.

After Mongols began attacking Kievan Russian principalities in 1237, the Knights took the opportunity to grab more lands in beleaguered northern Russia. In early 1241, with papal approval, the Teutonic Knights of Livonia, an independent branch of the Order, together with other German knights and vassal knights of the king of Denmark, mounted a crusade against Novgorod. Prince Alexander Yaroslavich Nevsky, then just 20 years old and living in exile, was recalled by the people of Novgorod to fend them off.

The prince was an excellent soldier and had been given the honorific of 'Nevsky' for a victory he had won over the Swedes at the Neva River in 1240. He had nonetheless been driven out soon afterwards by Novgorodians unhappy with his rule. Seeing the Teutonic Knights' attack as an opportunity to restore his own power, his first act on returning to Novgorod was to hang his political opponents. He then set off on a mission to rid his land of the German invaders, with the help of his elite druzhina bodyguards.

Despite the Crusaders' martial prowess, Nevsky racked up victories. Suitably affronted, the Knights amassed a large force to defeat the prince once and for all. On 5 April 1242, the Teutonic Knights of Livonia, together with other German knights, their Estonian auxiliary troops and some allied Danish knights, totalling around 2,600 men, caught up with Prince Alexander's 5,000-strong Russian army at Lake Peipus, which had frozen for the season.

The Knights attacked the Novgorodian army, thundering across the ice. While it must have made an epic sight, their decision to do so was not as rash as it might sound; the Knights regularly used frozen rivers as roadways during wintertime campaigns. But the heavily armoured Knights could not overcome the stout Russian defences, and they abandoned the field in defeat.

The Novgorodian victory at Lake Peipus was significant in that it stopped the further progress eastward of the Teutonic Knights into Russia and helped establish the demarcation line in Europe between Western Christianity and the Orthodox East. Nevsky ruled Novgorod until his death in 1263, was declared an Orthodox saint in 1547, and remains a national hero.

Actor Nikolay Cherkasov stars as Nevsky in Eisenstein's biopic

Northern Crusaders

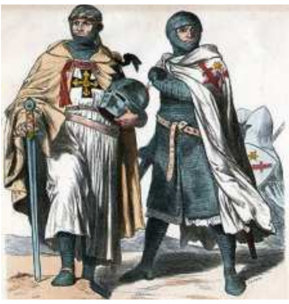
Troops 2,600
Cavalry 900
Infantry 1,700

Hermann von Buxhövden
Leader

Hermann came from a prominent family of German churchmen. After the disastrous Battle on the Ice, Hermann focused on state matters and founded an influential dynasty.

Strengths: He was a solid leader with real military skills.

Weaknesses: Hermann lacked sufficient troops with which to conduct the crusade.



Teutonic Knights of Livonia
Key unit

The Teutonic Knights of Livonia were an independent element of the larger Teutonic Knights order. The Knights lived like monks and were some of the best warriors of the Middle Ages.

Strengths: They were superb horsemen with unexcelled discipline on the battlefield.

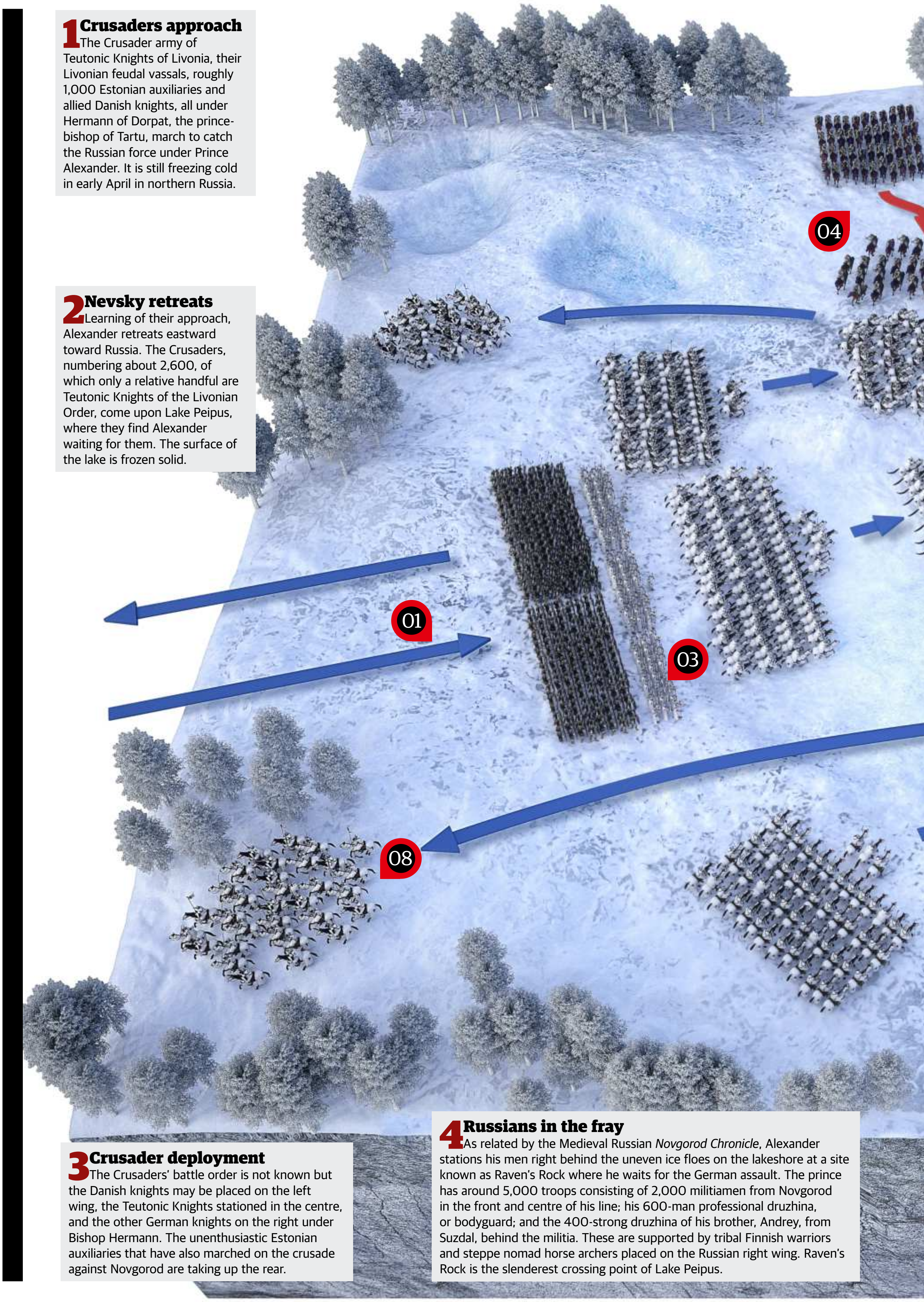
Weaknesses: The Teutonic Knights were few in number and roughly 100 fought at Lake Peipus.

Lance
Key weapon

The lance was a long spear used by mounted warriors all over Europe. It was a deadly weapon that could penetrate even the toughest armour.

Strengths: It had a long reach and a powerful punch on the charge.

Weaknesses: Lances were unwieldy and not much use once a charge had been delivered.



1 Crusaders approach

The Crusader army of Teutonic Knights of Livonia, their Livonian feudal vassals, roughly 1,000 Estonian auxiliaries and allied Danish knights, all under Hermann of Dorpat, the prince-bishop of Tartu, march to catch the Russian force under Prince Alexander. It is still freezing cold in early April in northern Russia.

2 Nevsky retreats

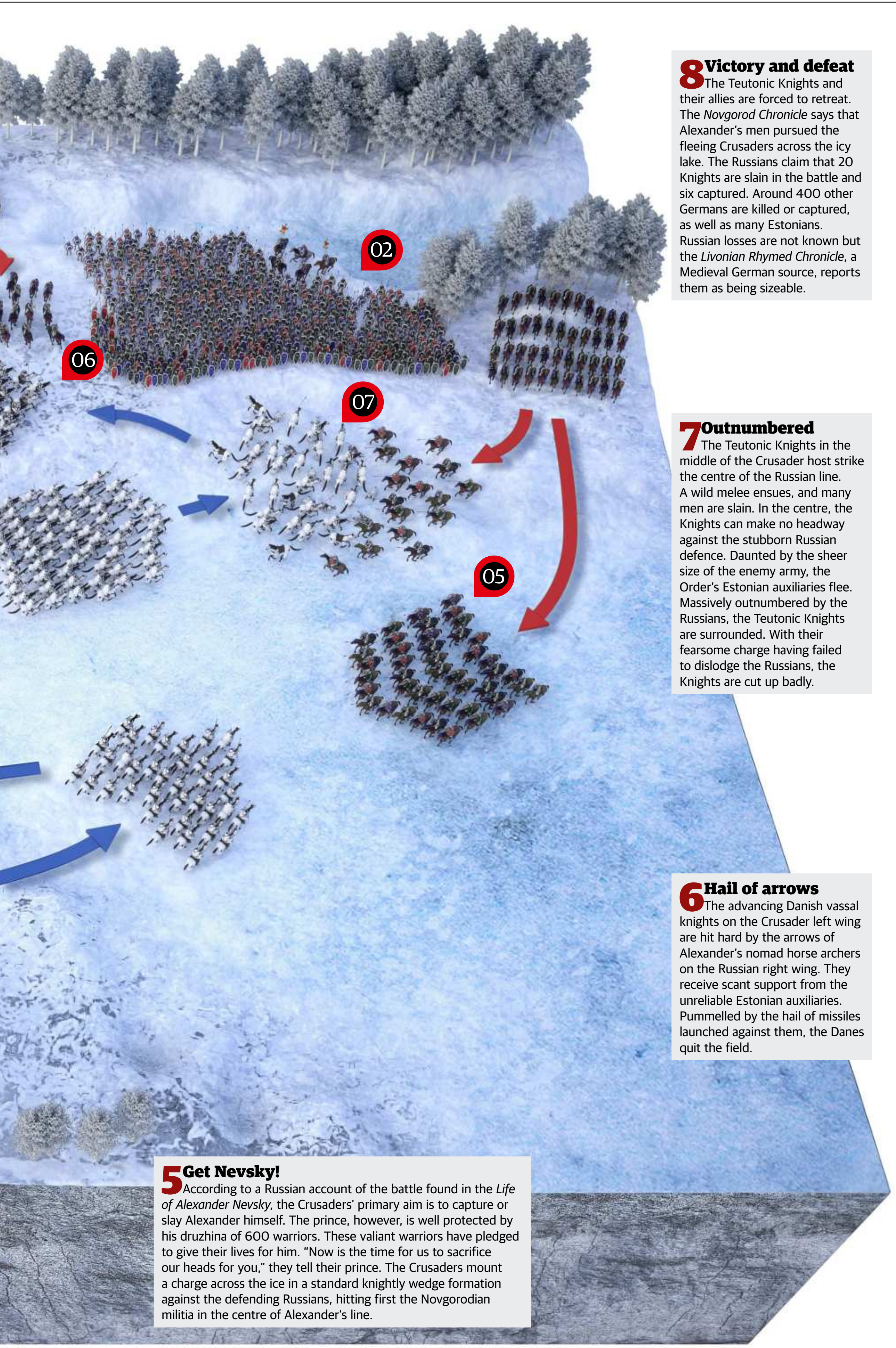
Learning of their approach, Alexander retreats eastward toward Russia. The Crusaders, numbering about 2,600, of which only a relative handful are Teutonic Knights of the Livonian Order, come upon Lake Peipus, where they find Alexander waiting for them. The surface of the lake is frozen solid.

3 Crusader deployment

The Crusaders' battle order is not known but the Danish knights may be placed on the left wing, the Teutonic Knights stationed in the centre, and the other German knights on the right under Bishop Hermann. The unenthusiastic Estonian auxiliaries that have also marched on the crusade against Novgorod are taking up the rear.

4 Russians in the fray

As related by the Medieval Russian *Novgorod Chronicle*, Alexander stations his men right behind the uneven ice floes on the lakeshore at a site known as Raven's Rock where he waits for the German assault. The prince has around 5,000 troops consisting of 2,000 militiamen from Novgorod in the front and centre of his line; his 600-man professional druzhina, or bodyguard; and the 400-strong druzhina of his brother, Andrey, from Suzdal, behind the militia. These are supported by tribal Finnish warriors and steppe nomad horse archers placed on the Russian right wing. Raven's Rock is the slenderest crossing point of Lake Peipus.



5 Get Nevsky!

According to a Russian account of the battle found in the *Life of Alexander Nevsky*, the Crusaders' primary aim is to capture or slay Alexander himself. The prince, however, is well protected by his druzhina of 600 warriors. These valiant warriors have pledged to give their lives for him. "Now is the time for us to sacrifice our heads for you," they tell their prince. The Crusaders mount a charge across the ice in a standard knightly wedge formation against the defending Russians, hitting first the Novgorodian militia in the centre of Alexander's line.

6 Hail of arrows

The advancing Danish vassal knights on the Crusader left wing are hit hard by the arrows of Alexander's nomad horse archers on the Russian right wing. They receive scant support from the unreliable Estonian auxiliaries. Pummelled by the hail of missiles launched against them, the Danes quit the field.

7 Outnumbered

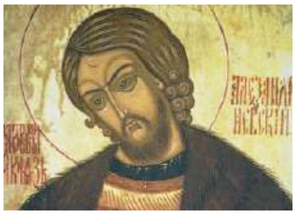
The Teutonic Knights in the middle of the Crusader host strike the centre of the Russian line. A wild melee ensues, and many men are slain. In the centre, the Knights can make no headway against the stubborn Russian defence. Daunted by the sheer size of the enemy army, the Order's Estonian auxiliaries flee. Massively outnumbered by the Russians, the Teutonic Knights are surrounded. With their fearsome charge having failed to dislodge the Russians, the Knights are cut up badly.

8 Victory and defeat

The Teutonic Knights and their allies are forced to retreat. The *Novgorod Chronicle* says that Alexander's men pursued the fleeing Crusaders across the icy lake. The Russians claim that 20 Knights are slain in the battle and six captured. Around 400 other Germans are killed or captured, as well as many Estonians. Russian losses are not known but the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, a Medieval German source, reports them as being sizeable.

Novogorod Republic

Troops 5,000
Cavalry 1,600
Infantry 3,400



Alexander Nevsky
Leader

Alexander Nevsky was a politician of rare acumen as well as a great war leader. His rule had alienated the people of Novgorod but they turned to him when the Crusaders threatened their city.

Strengths: He was a master tactician who used the frozen lake to the best advantage.

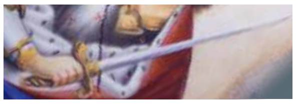
Weaknesses: Alexander's hold over Novgorod was not entirely secure.

Alexander's Druzhina
Key unit

A druzhina was a personal army of a Medieval Russian prince. These mounted warriors, close comrades of their lord, were sworn to fight for Alexander and, if need be, die for him.

Strengths: It had high morale and was well armed and armoured.

Weaknesses: The druzhina was expensive to equip and maintain.



Sword
Key weapon

Russian warriors prized their swords and often decorated them and their scabbards with precious metals.

Strengths: The sword was a potent weapon; with it, a warrior was able to both attack and defend himself.

Weaknesses: While relatively expensive, Russian steel was a bit on the brittle side, so swords sometimes lacked flexibility.

© Getty Images; Nicholas Forder

Betrayal of the Knights Templar

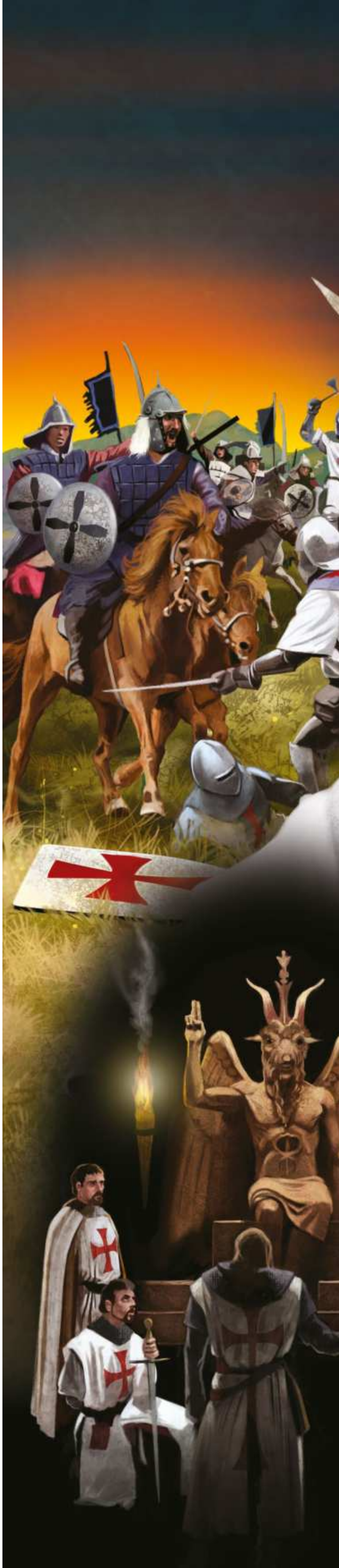
In seven years the Order was hunted, dismantled and executed. Was this justice for their sacrilegious practices, or were they the victims of a twisted plot?

Jacques de Molay was calm. Through seven long years of accusations, trials, torture, denials and confessions, he had been anything but calm, but as the frail, bearded man was led out onto the Île aux Juifs on the Seine, he did not weep or tremble. A crowd had gathered to watch the old man die, and a pyre had been erected on the small island, ready to be lit and claim his soul. De Molay was stripped of the rags that were once clothes, down to his threadbare shirt, then the guards strapped his thin, pale body to the stake. Finally, the silent man spoke. He asked to be turned to face the cathedral of Notre Dame, and that his hands be freed so he could die in prayer. These requests were granted, and De Molay bowed his head in silent prayer as the pyre was lit. The flames grew fast, and as the tongues of fire lashed up around his body, he spoke once more, his voice rising above the crackle of the flames.

"God knows who is in the wrong and has sinned!" he proclaimed. "Misfortune will soon befall those who have wrongly condemned us; God will avenge our deaths. Make no mistake, all who are against us will suffer because of us!" The flames rose higher, but the pain did not tell on his face. "Pope Clement, King Philip - hear me now!" His voice roared. "Within a year you will answer for your crimes before the presence of God!" After these final words, De Molay fell silent, and the flames claimed his soul.

Before the year was over, Pope Clement and Philip IV were dead. Clement finally succumbed to a long illness on 20 April 1314, and the French king died after a hunting accident on 29 November 1314, aged just 46. De Molay's order was all but extinct, but the curse of the last grand master of the Knights Templar would live on in infamy.

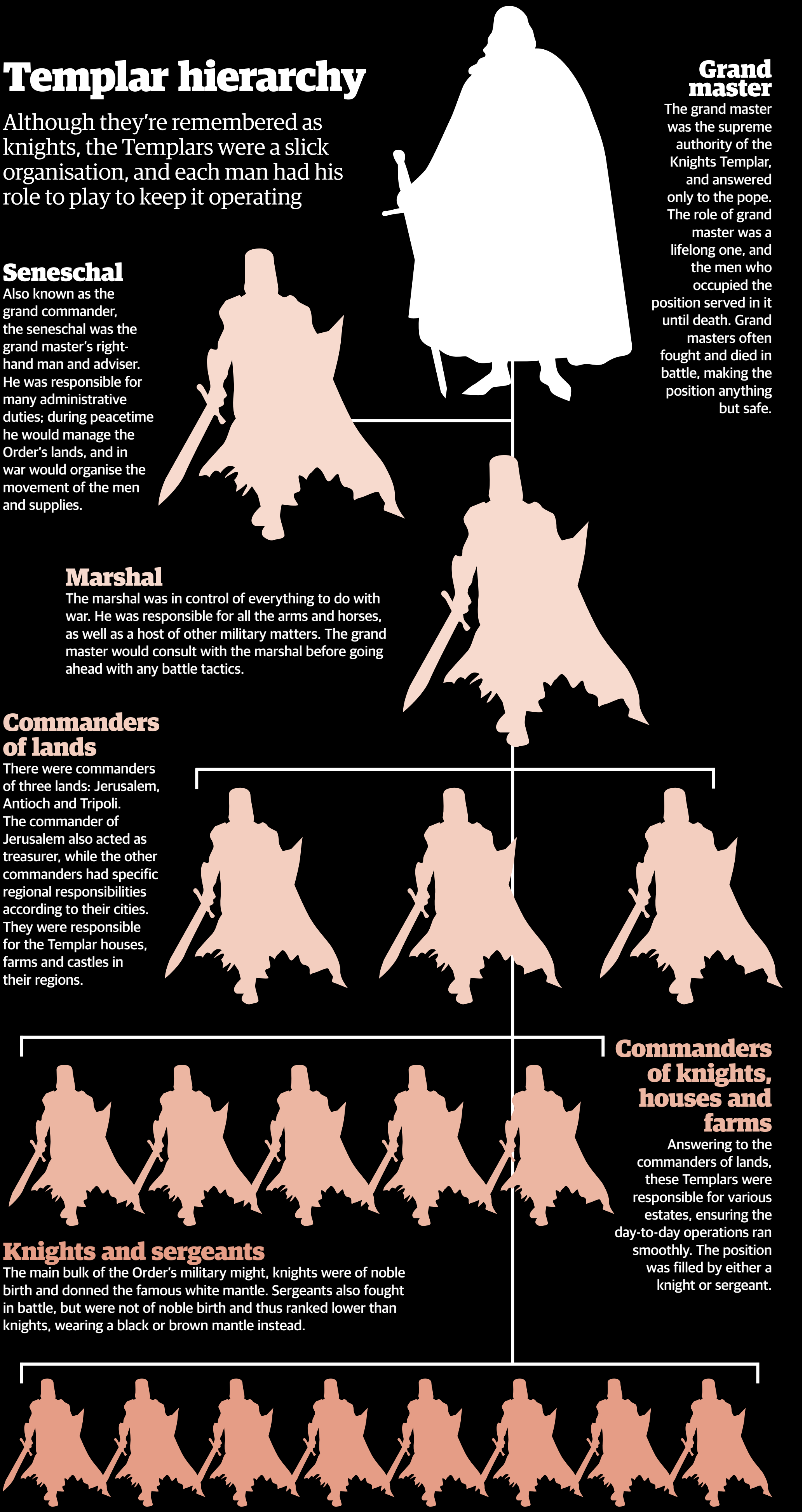
Jacques de Molay's famous last words may not have actually been spoken by the grand master himself. Like so many aspects of the Knights Templar, they have been distorted by myth and legend, and today we just don't know if he cursed his betrayers with his dying breath. Thanks to their



© Illustration: Joe Cummings

Templar hierarchy

Although they're remembered as knights, the Templars were a slick organisation, and each man had his role to play to keep it operating



Grand master

The grand master was the supreme authority of the Knights Templar, and answered only to the pope. The role of grand master was a lifelong one, and the men who occupied the position served in it until death. Grand masters often fought and died in battle, making the position anything but safe.

Seneschal

Also known as the grand commander, the seneschal was the grand master's right-hand man and adviser. He was responsible for many administrative duties; during peacetime he would manage the Order's lands, and in war would organise the movement of the men and supplies.

Marshal

The marshal was in control of everything to do with war. He was responsible for all the arms and horses, as well as a host of other military matters. The grand master would consult with the marshal before going ahead with any battle tactics.

Commanders of lands

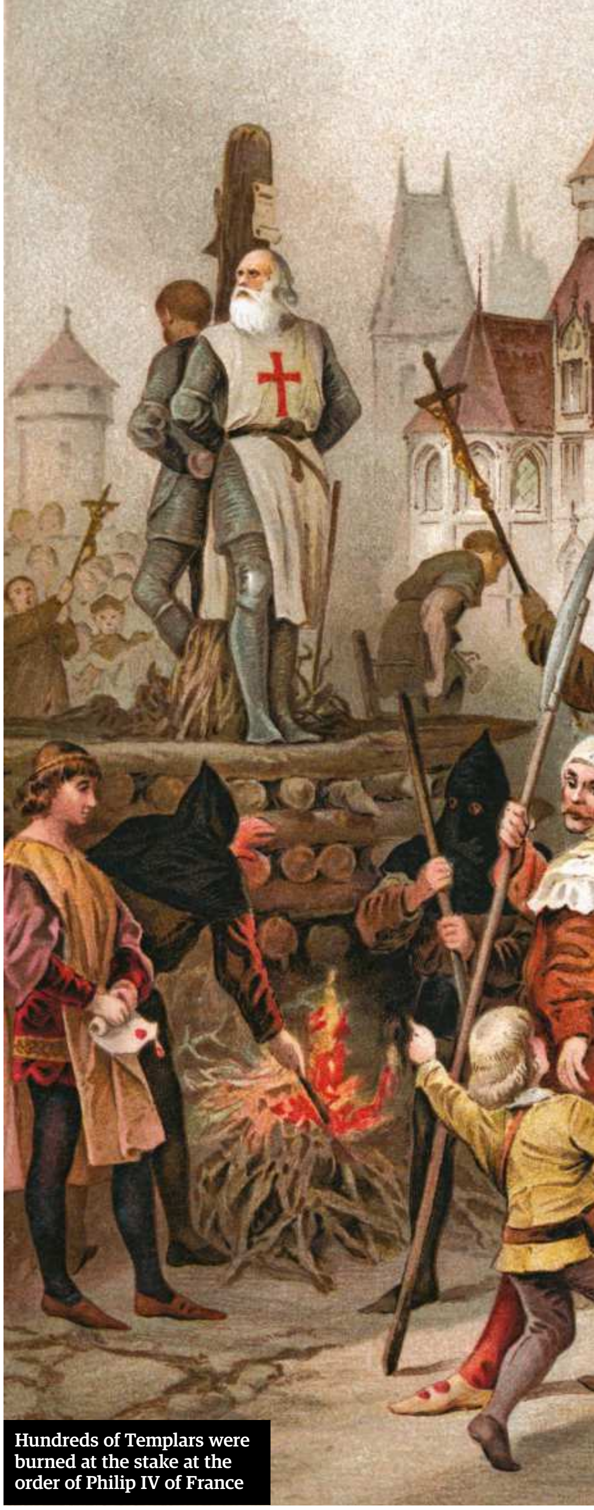
There were commanders of three lands: Jerusalem, Antioch and Tripoli. The commander of Jerusalem also acted as treasurer, while the other commanders had specific regional responsibilities according to their cities. They were responsible for the Templar houses, farms and castles in their regions.

Commanders of knights, houses and farms

Answering to the commanders of lands, these Templars were responsible for various estates, ensuring the day-to-day operations ran smoothly. The position was filled by either a knight or sergeant.

Knights and sergeants

The main bulk of the Order's military might, knights were of noble birth and donned the famous white mantle. Sergeants also fought in battle, but were not of noble birth and thus ranked lower than knights, wearing a black or brown mantle instead.



Hundreds of Templars were burned at the stake at the order of Philip IV of France

sudden and dramatic fall, an array of rumours, myths and conspiracies have persisted about the mysterious order, obscuring their true humble beginnings and devastating end that rocked 14th-century Europe.

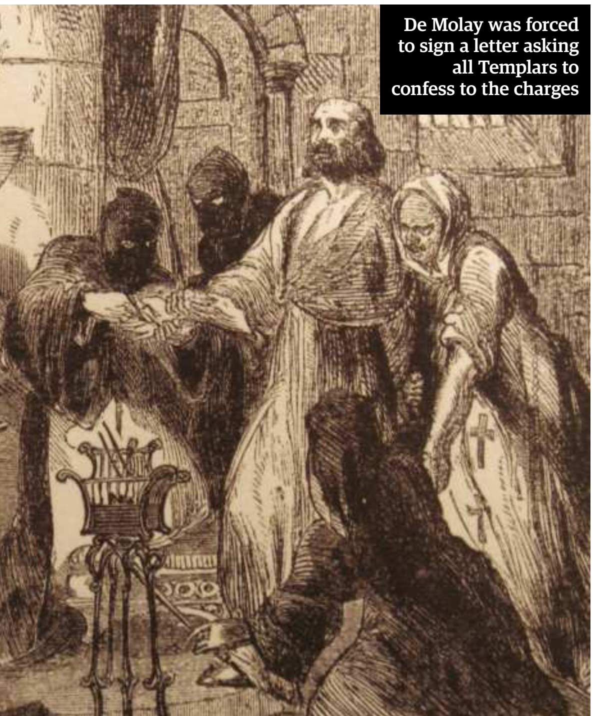
After the city of Jerusalem was captured by Christian forces in the First Crusade, many European pilgrims chose to make the journey to the Holy Land. However, this route was not safe for the Christians to travel along, so several knights charged themselves with protecting the roads from robbers and brigands. This guild of knights was founded on Christmas Day 1119 on the spot that marks the place where Jesus was crucified. As their headquarters were located on the Temple Mount, they became known as 'Knights of the Temple', or Knights Templar.

Although the Order began in virtual poverty, relying on donations to survive, they quickly became one of the most powerful monastic orders in the Medieval world. With papal approval, money, land and eager young noblemen poured into the Templars' resources. Serving as the West's first uniformed standing army in their white tunics emblazoned with a fiery red cross, the Templars quickly achieved legendary status in battle.

This reputation as god's warriors was encouraged by their victory at the Battle of Montgisard, where 500 Templars helped an army numbering a few thousand defeat 26,000 of Saladin's soldiers. As well as being a mighty military force, they also controlled a vast financial network, which has been recognised as the world's first modern banking system. Many nobles who wished to join the crusades placed their wealth under the control of the Templars, who then issued them with letters of credit. This could be used at Templar houses around the world to 'withdraw' their funds. By the 13th century, the Templars were one of the most powerful and wealthy organisations in the world, entirely unaware that a dramatic and terrible fate awaited them. However, it would not be the Muslims in the East who would bring about their downfall, but their fellow Christians in the West.

After the fall of Acre in 1291, the West lost its last Christian possessions in the Holy Land. The Templars were cast out from their origins and stripped of their raison d'être. When Jacques de Molay ascended as grand master in 1293, he had one goal in mind – to reclaim what the Templars had lost. De Molay travelled across the West to rustle up support; he received it from Pope Boniface and Edward I of England. But the crusade was a disaster, and De Molay lost 120 knights trying to land in Syria. In 1306, the Templars supported a coup in Cyprus that forced Henry II to abdicate in favour of his brother.

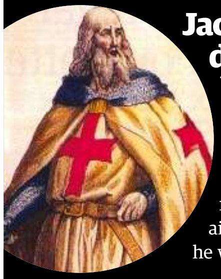
These actions did not go by unnoticed. Many monarchs in countries with powerful Templar presences began to feel uneasy – with their power, what was to stop the Templars supporting baronial uprisings in their own countries? The Templars had also been very vocal in their desire to form their own state, similar to Prussia's Teutonic Knights and



De Molay was forced to sign a letter asking all Templars to confess to the charges

Key figures

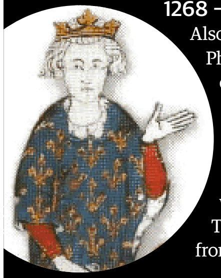
The men who destroyed the Order, and those who fought to defend it



Jacques de Molay

1243 – 18 MARCH 1314

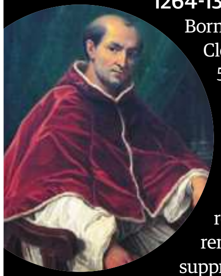
The 23rd and last grand master of the Knights Templar. Little is known of De Molay's early life, but he subsequently became the most well known Templar. He aimed to reform the Order, a goal he was never able to fulfil.



Philip IV of France

1268 – 29 NOVEMBER 1314

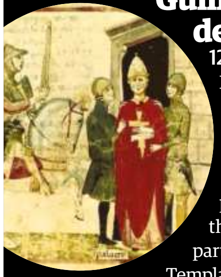
Also known as the Iron King, Philip led France from a feudal country to a centralised state. He had great belief in an all-powerful monarchy, and it was his ambition to fill thrones worldwide with his relatives. As well as destroying the Knights Templar, he also expelled Jews from France.



Pope Clement V

1264-1314

Born Raymond Bertrand de Got, Clement was made pope on 5 June 1305. There is some dispute over his loyalty to Philip IV, with some painting him as nothing but a tool for the French king, while others believing he showed surprising resistance. Either way, he is now remembered as the pope who suppressed the Knights Templar.



Guillaume de Nogaret

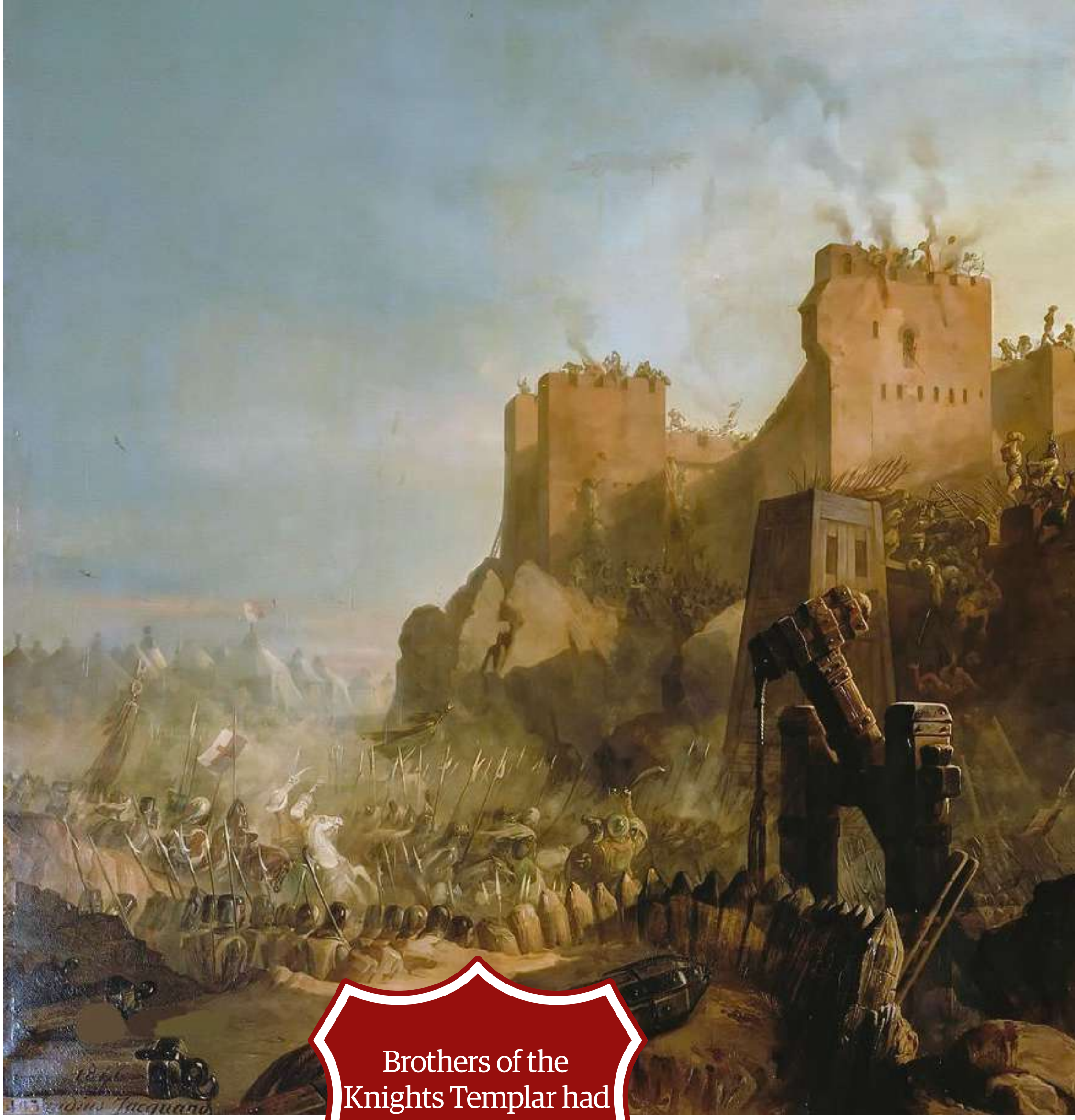
1260-1313

Keeper of the seal to Philip IV of France, Guillaume had previously played a role in the dispute between Philip and Pope Boniface; apparently persuading the king to kidnap the pope. He also had a central part in the fall of the Knights Templar, forcing members to give testimony against the Order.

Geoffroi de Charney

UNKNOWN – 1314

Serving as preceptor of Normandy, Charney was a member of the Knights Templar from a young age and rose through the ranks. Like much of his order, he was arrested, tortured and confessed, then later retracted his statement. Charney was the only one of the three senior leaders arrested to rally by his master's side and deny the charges.



In numbers

20,000

members at their peak

54+

Templars burned to death in May 1310

15 witnesses gave evidence against the Order before 12 May 1310 – compared to 198 after

597

witnesses defended the Order before 12 May 1310 – compared to 14 after

9 knights were originally gathered to protect pilgrims

200,000

livres paid by the Knights Hospitallers to the French king as 'compensation'

the Knights Hospitaller, another Catholic military order, in Rhodes.

In 1305, De Molay received a letter from Pope Clement V, then based in France, concerning the possibility of merging the Templars with the Hospitaller. De Molay was ardently against the idea, but in 1306 Clement invited both grand masters to France to discuss the issue further, instructing them to "come hither without delay, with as much secrecy as possible." De Molay arrived in 1307, but Foulques de Villaret, the leader of the Hospitaller, was either delayed or sensed something was amiss, as he did not arrive, and while the pope and De Molay waited, an entirely different subject of discussion was raised.

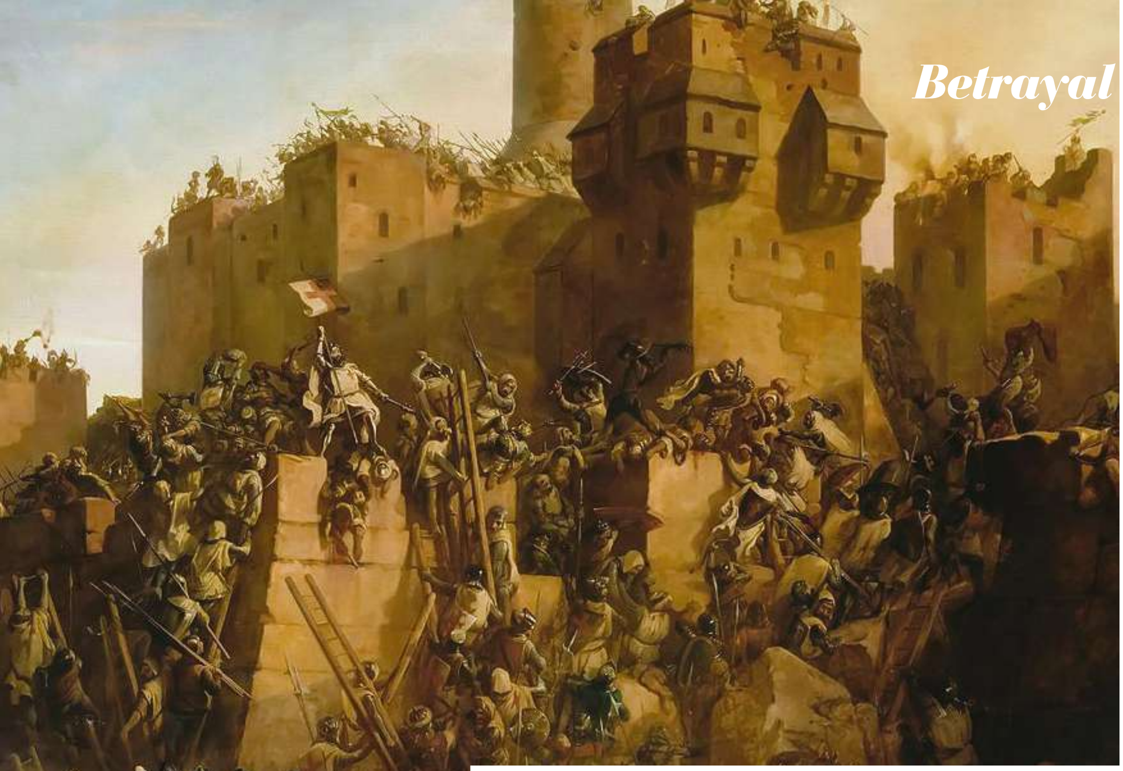
Two years previously, an ousted Templar had accused the Order of many criminal charges, and although they were generally believed to be false, King Philip IV of France had recently brought them back into discussion. De Molay, tiring of the ludicrous accusations, asked Clement to look into the matter to rid him of the whole messy situation. On 24 August, Clement wrote to Philip, saying that he did not believe the accusations but would start an inquiry "not without great sorrow, anxiety and upset of heart," and advised Philip to take no further action. Philip did not listen. At dawn on Friday 13 October, the king's forces arrested every Templar they could find in France.

Philip IV's harsh actions were not unprecedented; he had a reputation as a rash and violent king. Philip had previously clashed with Pope Boniface VIII, and launched an anti-papal campaign against him. Believing France should have centralised royal power, the feud escalated and ended with Philip attempting to kidnap the pope in 1303 to bring him to France to face charges of heresy. The shock ultimately killed Boniface, whose successor, Benedict XI, was then only in the position for nine months before his own death. This allowed the king to appoint his selection, Clement, to the papacy. Philip had also previously arrested wealthy Italian bankers in the city, stripping them of their assets; then his target switched to the Jews, who were thrown out of the kingdom. These actions can be easily explained – Philip had inherited a kingdom on the brink of financial crisis, and he also believed that his authority was above that of the pope. Not only did he owe the Templars a great deal of money, but their link to the church made them the perfect choice for establishing the power of the monarchy. With their plans to form their own state, the Order had basically sealed their own fate. The Templars had to fall for Philip to rise. When the Templars in France were arrested, the charges put against them were heresy, sodomy, blasphemy and denying Christ. By charging them with heresy, Philip could paint himself as a soldier of Christ, similar to his sainted grandfather Louis IX. But his actions were a violation of the church in Rome's orders, and Clement was furious. Philip had likely believed the pope to be a frail and infirm old man and certainly not a threat, but Clement wrote angrily to Philip, accusing him of violating every rule in the book in this "act of contempt towards the Roman Church."

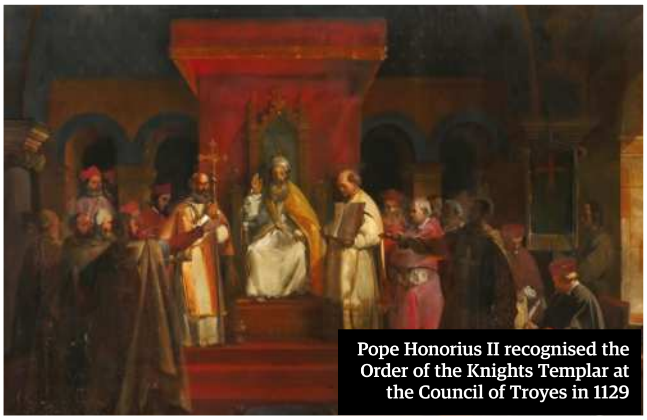
This did little to help the brothers of the temple. Some 15,000 Templars now resided in the prisons of France, many of whom were not nobles or knights, but mere farmers and shepherds. De Molay didn't escape capture either; just a day after acting as pallbearer at the funeral of the king's sister-in-law, the grand master was arrested along with the rest of his order. Philip seized their land and set about ensuring he obtained the confessions he needed to smash the Order to pieces.

There was one very simple way of acquiring confessions, and Philip employed it to great success: torture. Philip's inquisitors utilised a variety of horrific and demoralising methods to break the men's wills. The rack, which stretched a victim's body and dislocated his joints, was frequently used, as was strappado, which involved binding a victim's

> Brothers of the Knights Templar had to keep their hair and beards trimmed, and they weren't allowed to wear gloves or laced-up boots



This painting was created when rumours were rife that De Molay had re-captured Jerusalem



Pope Honorius II recognised the Order of the Knights Templar at the Council of Troyes in 1129

hands with rope that ran up a pulley, raising him in the air, then dropping him rapidly. The soles of prisoners' feet were greased then set alight with flame, teeth were pulled and limbs were flayed. The men were confined to cold, dark cells, and those who did not survive the torture were secretly buried. One anonymous writer in 1308 wrote of the conditions in the cells: "The human tongue cannot express the punishment, afflictions, miseries, taunts, and dire kinds of torture suffered by the said innocents in the space of three months, since the day of their arrest, since by day and night constant sobs and sighs have not ceased in their cells, nor have cries and gnashing of teeth ceased in their tortures… Truth kills them, and lies liberate them from death."

It is of no surprise that when the Templars were brought to trial, many confessed to the various offences put against them. The Order was faced with five initial charges: the renouncement of and spitting on the cross during initiation; the kissing of the initiate on the navel, mouth and posteriors; the permitting of homosexual acts; that the cord they wore had been wrapped around an idol they worshipped; and that they did not consecrate the host during mass. Over the trials, the charges against the Templars grew and grew in number, ranging from burning infants to abusing virgins and even forcing young brethren to eat the ashes of the dead. Although these charges seem outrageous and somewhat farfetched today, Philip was operating at a time when paranoia and suspicion surrounding God and the devil was so rife that it could be reasonably believed that such devilish practices had infiltrated the church.

In hearings presided over by the inquisitors who had overseen the torture, 134 of 138 brothers confessed to one or more of the charges. De Molay himself signed a confession after undergoing the flaying of his limbs and testicles. This was quickly followed by matching confessions from all senior members of the Order. However, when Clement insisted the confessions be heard before a papal committee, De Molay and his men did an about turn. Safely away from Philip's control, De Molay retracted his confession, claiming he only gave it initially due to the torture he suffered. The other Templars followed suit and Philip's plans for a swift and brutal end to the Order vanished.

In an attempt to convince Clement, Philip visited him at Poitiers and sent 72 Templars to confess before him. He had his forces dispense pamphlets and give speeches concerning the depravity of the Templars. Philip warned that if the pope didn't act, he would have to be removed in order to defend Catholicism. Harangued, bullied and now under virtual house arrest, Clement gave in and ordered an investigation into the Templars. De Molay and the other senior members retracted their retractions and Philip's grand plans were in motion once again.

The Templars across Europe

When the pope ordered Christian monarchs across Europe to arrest Templars, not all were willing

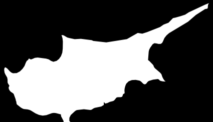
British Isles

Edward II was initially sceptical about the Templars' guilt and had no reasons to view them as a threat. He wrote to the pope in defence of the Order, but was eventually forced to arrest and try many Templars. Initially, torture was not allowed and all the Templars pleaded innocent, but when the pope's inquisitors took over, confessions came fast. However, they were spared burning and simply forced to repent publicly. Those who refused were incarcerated until death.

Italy

The situation in Italy varied. The Papal States unsurprisingly acted at once, but in Lombardy there was widespread support for the Order. For the number of Templars confessing to the accusations, there were just as many claiming the others were lying. In Florence, despite using torture, only six of 13 Templars confessed.

Cyprus



King Amaury de Lusignan had gained his crown thanks to the Templars, so was understandably reluctant to arrest them. However, the leading Templars were eventually incarcerated after putting up a brave resistance. At trial, there were many witnesses who praised the Templars, but the king was brutally murdered during the trial and Henry II, enemy of the Templars, regained the throne. Torture began almost immediately, and many perished while they were protesting their innocence.

Portugal

The Templars in Portugal got off lightly compared to their counterparts elsewhere. King Denis I refused to persecute the Order, but could not overrule the papal bull to abolish the Templars. Instead, the Templars re-branded themselves as the 'Order of Christ' with the assured protection of Denis I, who also negotiated with Clement's successor for the Order to inherit the Templars' assets.

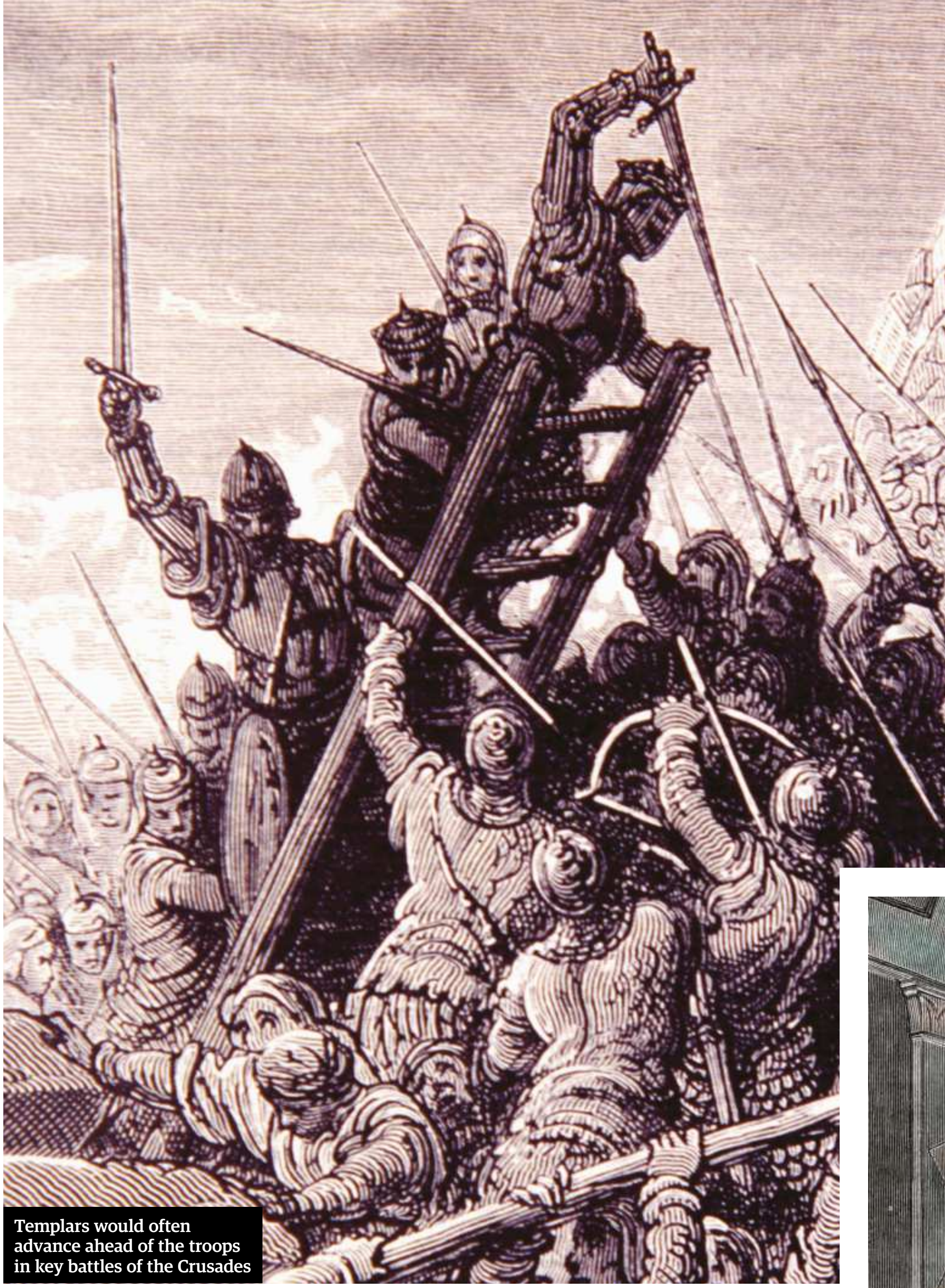
Iberian Peninsula

Despite initial doubts, James II of Aragon ordered the arrest of most of the Templars on 6 January 1308, before the pope ordered him to do so. However, many of the Templars set up defences in their castles and appealed for help, which unfortunately did not come. All of the Templars pleaded their innocence. With torture prohibited, no confessions were secured, and no Templar was condemned to death for heresy.

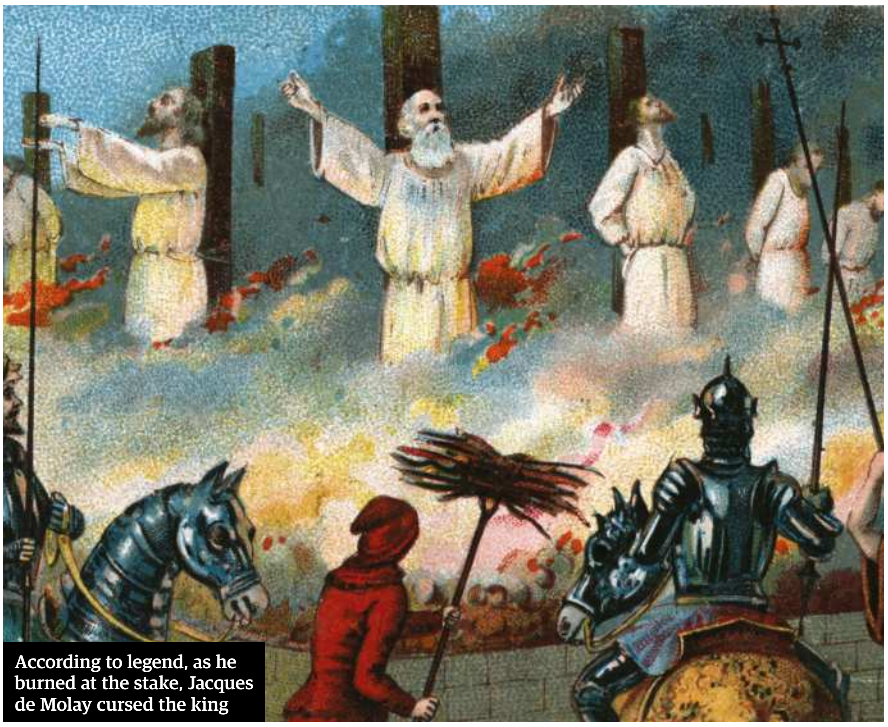
Guilty or innocent?

Was there any truth to the crimes the Templars burned for?

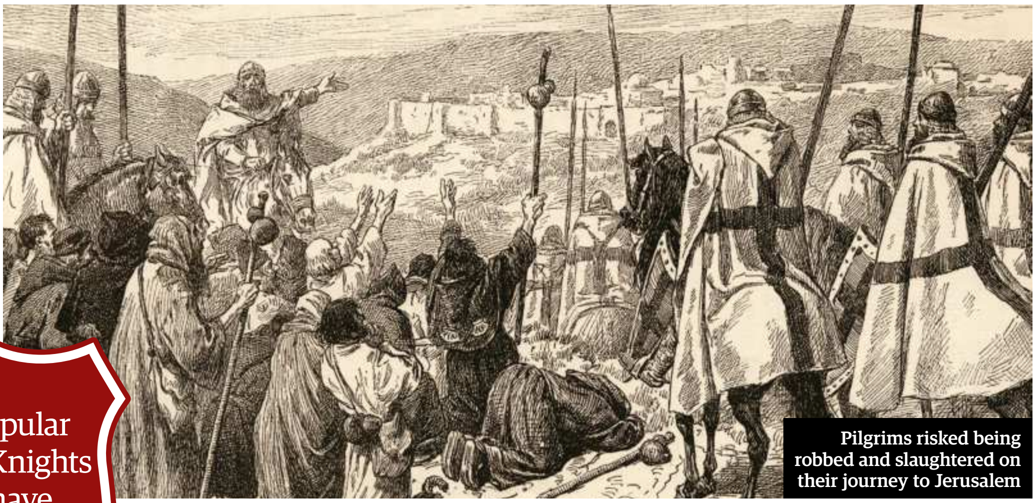
	For	Against
Spitting on the cross	Although often written as one of Philip's many trumped-up charges, there is evidence that this accusation had basis in fact. Not only did a number of Templars confess to it, but Philip's spies, who secretly joined the Order, confirmed it. A recent discovery of the 'Chinon Parchment' in the Vatican library further confirms the charges. Under questioning in 1308, Jacques de Molay admitted to such practices.	Although De Molay confirmed that spitting on the cross took place, chalking this up to heresy shows a lack of understanding. De Molay said these practices were designed to harden a Templar to the torture he would be subjected to by Saracens, training them to deny their faith "with the mind only and not with the heart." Philip's spies may very well have witnessed such acts, but they likely misunderstood their purpose.
Worship of an idol called Baphomet	The charge put against the Templars read "they surrounded or touched each head of the idols with small cords, which they wore around themselves next to the shirt or the flesh." Unlike Philip's other charges, this accusation was so specific to the Templars that it's difficult to believe he didn't have some inside information. Many knights did admit to worshipping this idol, which usually took the form of a life-sized head. We know for a fact that the Knights Templar possessed heads, such as the head of St Euphemia of Chalcedon. The fact that the Order kept these heads means that they certainly could have worshipped them in some way.	Only nine Templars in the Paris trials admitted to head worship, and descriptions of this 'idol' differed across Europe. In one version it was "covered in old skin, with two carbunkles for eyes," in another it was made of gold and silver; one had three or four legs, while in another account the head had horns. These conflicting accounts heavily indicate that these confessions were the result of torture. This idol was allegedly named 'Baphomet', but it may be the case that this was a mistranslation of 'Mahomet', ie Muhammad. Either way, if the Templars did indeed worship such an idol, it seems unusual that their temples were not filled with clear symbols of this figure.
Homosexuality	The charges the Templars faced were that "they told the brothers whom they received they could have carnal relations together… that they ought to do and submit to this mutually." As the Templars took vows of celibacy and were not permitted to wed, it was believed that they engaged in homosexual activity to satisfy their desires. Although few confessed, many testified that sexual activity was not prohibited. The fact that so many denied it under torture is an indication of just how shamefully sodomy was viewed, giving the Templars all the more reason to hide the truth.	This was the most common accusation used during this era to discredit or ruin anyone. Philip had already charged Pope Boniface VIII with very similar accusations, and it seemed to be his favourite tool to use against his enemies as it was difficult to disprove. However, despite the torture, only three Templars confessed to sodomy in the Paris trials. Although De Molay was quick to confess to denying Christ, he vehemently opposed this accusation, stating that the Templar rules clearly prohibit any such behaviour with harsh punishment, such as expulsion from the Order.



Templars would often advance ahead of the troops in key battles of the Crusades

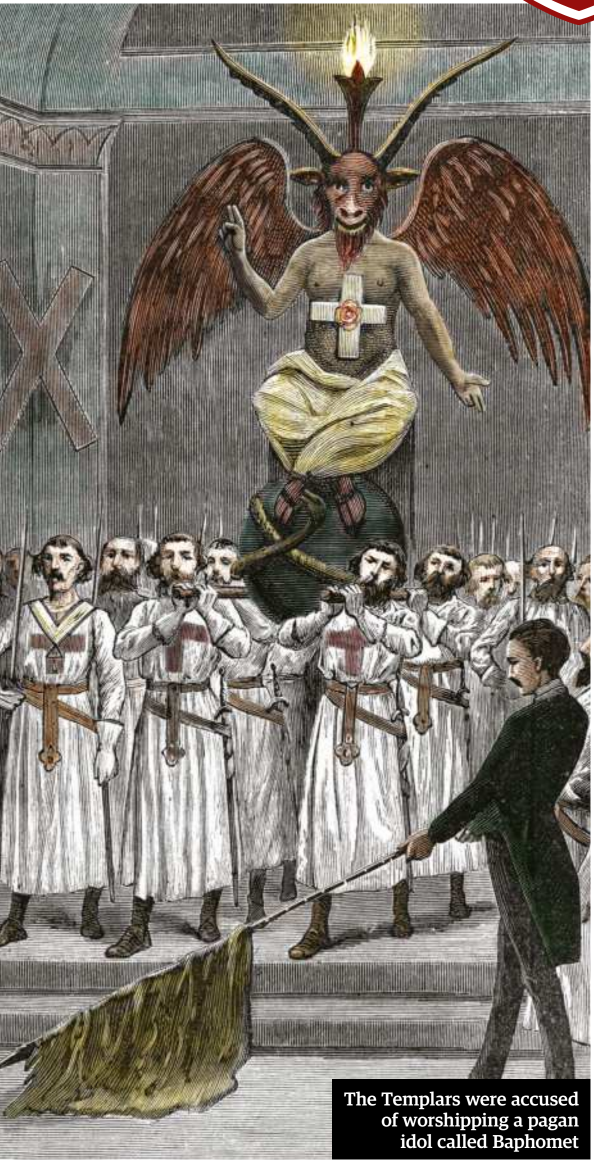


According to legend, as he burned at the stake, Jacques de Molay cursed the king



Pilgrims risked being robbed and slaughtered on their journey to Jerusalem

In modern popular culture, the Knights Templar have been the basis for famous fictional organisations like *Star Wars*' Jedi



The Templars were accused of worshipping a pagan idol called Baphomet

The Templars had nothing in the form of legal council; De Molay expressed desires to defend his order but was unable to as a "poor, unlettered knight." In 1310, two Templars with legal training made an impressive defence against the charges - insisting that the Templars were not only innocent but also at the sharp end of a cruel plot. The tide was beginning to turn in the Templars' favour, so Philip made a swift and brutal decision. On 12 May 1310, 54 Templars who had previously withdrawn their confessions were burned at the stake as relapsed heretics and the two Templar defenders disappeared from prison.

With nobody to defend them, the Templar case crumbled. Under extreme pressure from Philip and likely wishing to rid himself of the whole matter once and for all, Clement issued an edict that officially dissolved the Order. This didn't mean the brothers were guilty, but it was the end of the Knights Templar for good. Much to Philip's annoyance, a second papal bull was issued that transferred the Templars' wealth to the Hospitaller. Finally, the bull 'Considerantes Dudum' allowed each province to deal with the Templars residing there as they saw fit. The fate of the leaders, however, was in the hands of the church.

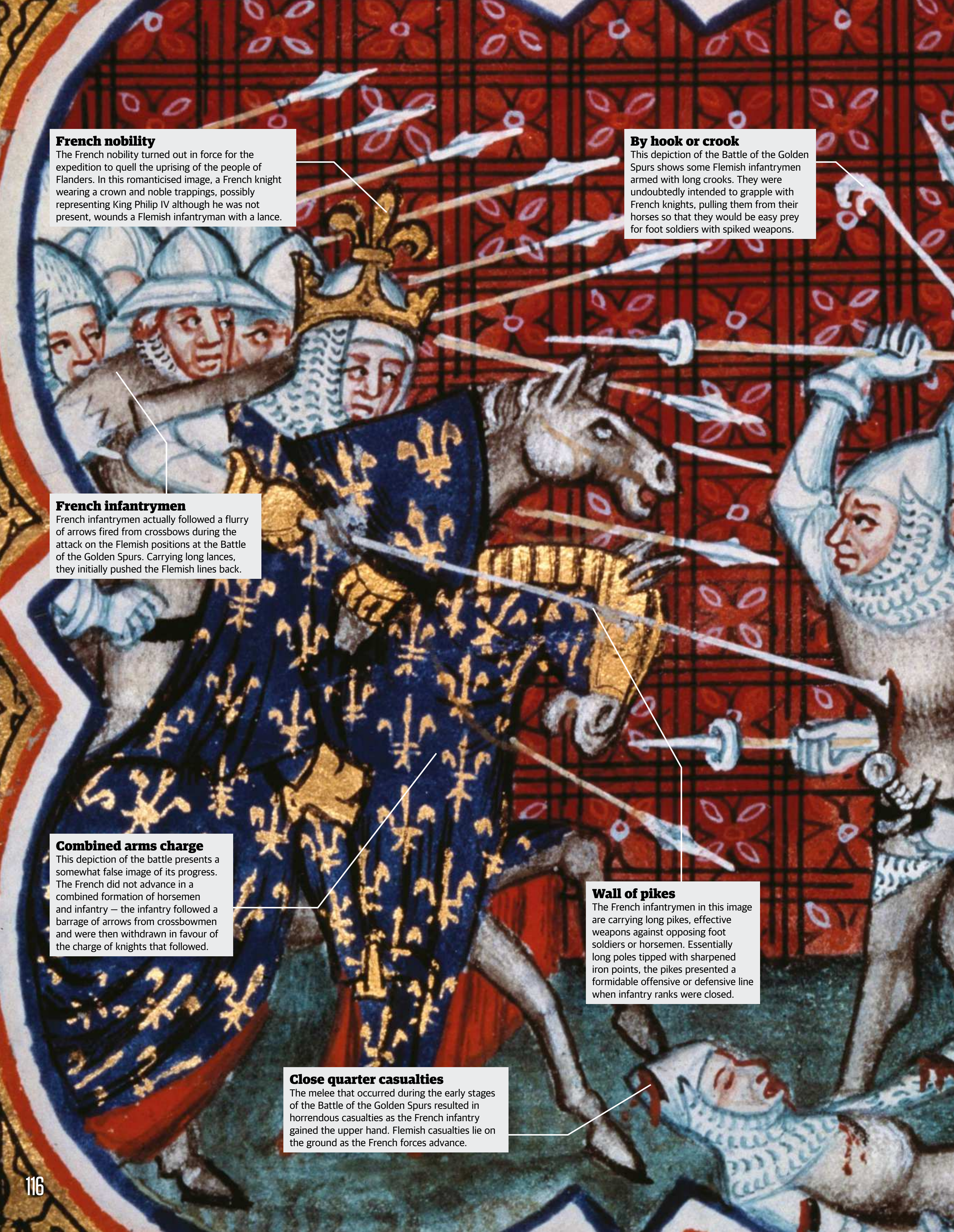
De Molay and three of his senior members languished in prison, awaiting news of their fates. Finally, on 18 March 1314, the leaders were led out to a platform in front of Notre Dame to hear their sentences. All four were old men; De Molay was, by now, at least 70, while the others ranged from 50-60. Due to their earlier confessions, they were found guilty of heresy and condemned to life imprisonment. Two of the men silently accepted their fate, but faced with living out the rest of his life starving in a dank, dark cell as the last leader of a humiliated and disgraced order, De Molay finally found his voice. To the shock of the crowd, and the horror of the cardinals, the grand master and his loyal master of Normandy, Geoffroi de Charney, loudly protested their innocence. They denied their confessions, insisting their order was nothing but holy and pure. For seven years of imprisonment, De Molay had failed to defend his order, but now he was doing it - with his life.

This was completely unexpected, and left the cardinals confused about what to do. When the news reached Philip, he was furious. He ruled that as the Templars were now professing their innocence, they were guilty of being relapsed heretics, the punishment for which was death by fire. Before the end of the day, De Molay and De Charney were dead. Instead of living out his final days disgraced in a cell, De Molay's final moments of bravery led many to hail him as a martyr.

The remaining Templars were not released from their monastic vows and many were subjected to penances such as lengthy prison sentences. Others joined the Knights Hospitallers and some were sent to live out their remaining days in isolated monasteries. Even with these numbers accounted for, there are still question marks over what happened to the tens of thousands of brothers across Europe. The Order's archive was never found along with the majority of their treasures, leading many to believe that the Templars received some sort of warning, allowing many to escape prior to the initial arrests. Various conspiracy theories regarding the fate of the remaining Templars have been concocted, from the proposition that they escaped on a fleet of ships to western Scotland to them becoming Swiss freedom fighters. Although we do know the sad tale that ended the Order, the mystery of what became of the remaining Templars is likely to stay unsolved.

"They denied their confessions, insisting their order was nothing but holy and pure"

© Alamy, Corbis, Getty Images



French nobility

The French nobility turned out in force for the expedition to quell the uprising of the people of Flanders. In this romanticised image, a French knight wearing a crown and noble trappings, possibly representing King Philip IV although he was not present, wounds a Flemish infantryman with a lance.

By hook or crook

This depiction of the Battle of the Golden Spurs shows some Flemish infantrymen armed with long crooks. They were undoubtedly intended to grapple with French knights, pulling them from their horses so that they would be easy prey for foot soldiers with spiked weapons.

French infantrymen

French infantrymen actually followed a flurry of arrows fired from crossbows during the attack on the Flemish positions at the Battle of the Golden Spurs. Carrying long lances, they initially pushed the Flemish lines back.

Combined arms charge

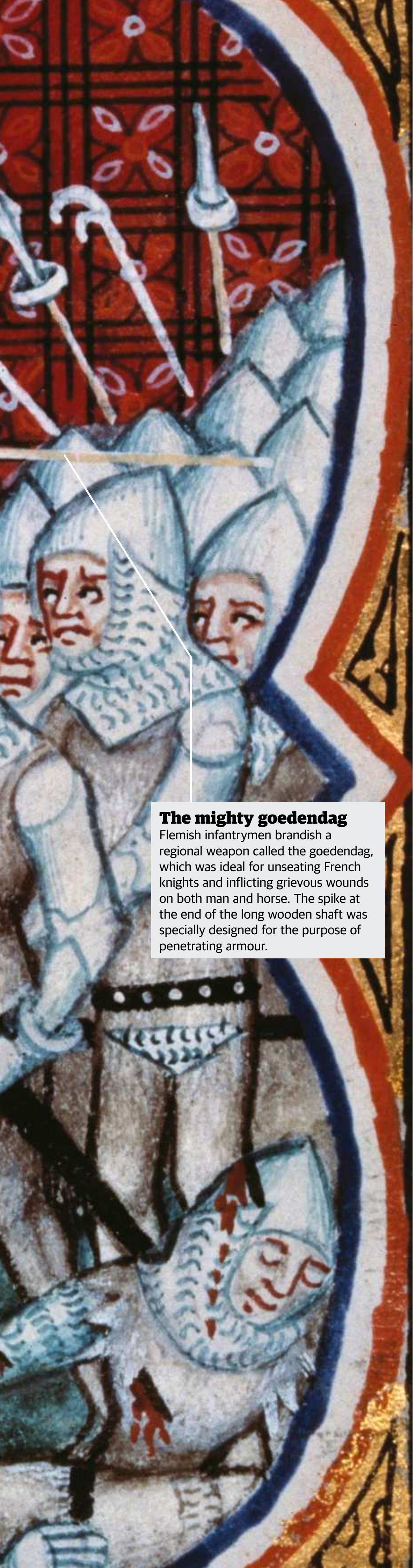
This depiction of the battle presents a somewhat false image of its progress. The French did not advance in a combined formation of horsemen and infantry — the infantry followed a barrage of arrows from crossbowmen and were then withdrawn in favour of the charge of knights that followed.

Wall of pikes

The French infantrymen in this image are carrying long pikes, effective weapons against opposing foot soldiers or horsemen. Essentially long poles tipped with sharpened iron points, the pikes presented a formidable offensive or defensive line when infantry ranks were closed.

Close quarter casualties

The melee that occurred during the early stages of the Battle of the Golden Spurs resulted in horrendous casualties as the French infantry gained the upper hand. Flemish casualties lie on the ground as the French forces advance.



The mighty goedendag
Flemish infantrymen brandish a regional weapon called the goedendag, which was ideal for unseating French knights and inflicting grievous wounds on both man and horse. The spike at the end of the long wooden shaft was specially designed for the purpose of penetrating armour.

Battle of the Golden Spurs

Discover how the French and the Flemish fought to the death over land and loyalty

The territorial ambitions of King Philip IV of France and the Flemish desire to throw off the oppressive French yoke spawned the Battle of the Golden Spurs, also known as the Battle of Courtrai, in Flanders on 11 July 1302. The heavy hand of French rule brought periods of unrest to Flanders, and rebellion followed when Flemish militia laid siege to Courtrai Castle, an unwilling host to a French garrison.

Word of the uprising reached Philip, who sent an army of 2,500 of the finest noble knights of the realm along with 5,500 infantrymen under Count Robert II of Artois to quell the insurrection. The Flemish army comprised volunteers from across the region. Rather than noblemen, the troops were craftsmen, members of the various guilds that were prevalent among the middle and lower social classes in Europe at the time. Although they were not professional soldiers, they trained together, taking pride in their martial capabilities.

Cost was a significant factor in the opposing armies – outfitting a knight was expensive. A worthy steed was also costly, and thus knighthood was usually reserved for the nobility. The Flemish were outfitted at a much lower cost, typically armed with the goedendag, a weapon similar to a pike, and usually just wore helmets and light armour. Flemish strength approached 9,000 infantrymen and estimates of knights range from ten to 200, with the force being led by William of Jülich and Guy of Namur.

As the French marched across Flanders towards Courtrai, news of their atrocities enraged the Flemish people. Unable to seize Courtrai Castle, the Flemish instead prepared for battle, and dug trenches, holes and impediments to charging horses on favourable ground. Anchoring their line along the River Lys, they took advantage of the small streams and marshes nearby that would slow an attacking force. The French would be funnelled into a narrow approach.

The battle opened with an exchange of arrows from crossbowmen. The French advanced, making good progress, and stretched the Flemish line. However, Robert of Artois recalled his infantry to allow the haughty knights the honour of finishing off the upstart Flemish.

The French rapidly ran into trouble: the difficult terrain prevented a coordinated effort, and the horsemen broke up into small groups that were assailed by the Flemish wielding the goedendag with deadly efficiency. One group of Frenchmen broke through, but was surrounded and slaughtered. The French infantry fled. Robert of Artois begged for his life but was not spared. While only 100 Flemish were killed, the French nobility lost 1,000.

Following their triumph, the Flemish gathered hundreds of spurs from fallen French knights, giving it its name. The battle ushered in an 'age of infantry' that ended the preeminence of the mounted knight; even small regions could raise powerful armies at reasonable expense, and future battles of the Middle Ages were fought much differently.

> 11 July, the day of the battle, became Flemish Community Day in 1973, celebrated by the Flemish in Belgium

French Army

Troops 5,500
Knights 2.500

Count Robert II of Artois

Leader

Count Robert II of Artois was an experienced commander and was known to have won numerous contests in single combat.

Strengths: Veteran commander with a good grasp of military and battlefield tactics.

Weaknesses: Unable to adapt to changing circumstances and failure to understand terrain.

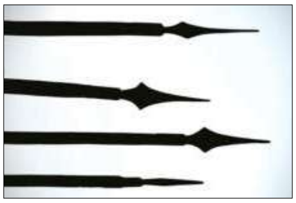
French Knights

Key unit

The heavily armed and armoured noble knight was the king of the battlefield prior to the Battle of the Golden Spurs.

Strengths: Armour protection and weight of attacking force.

Weakness: Lack of mobility if unhorsed and vulnerable to prepared infantry.



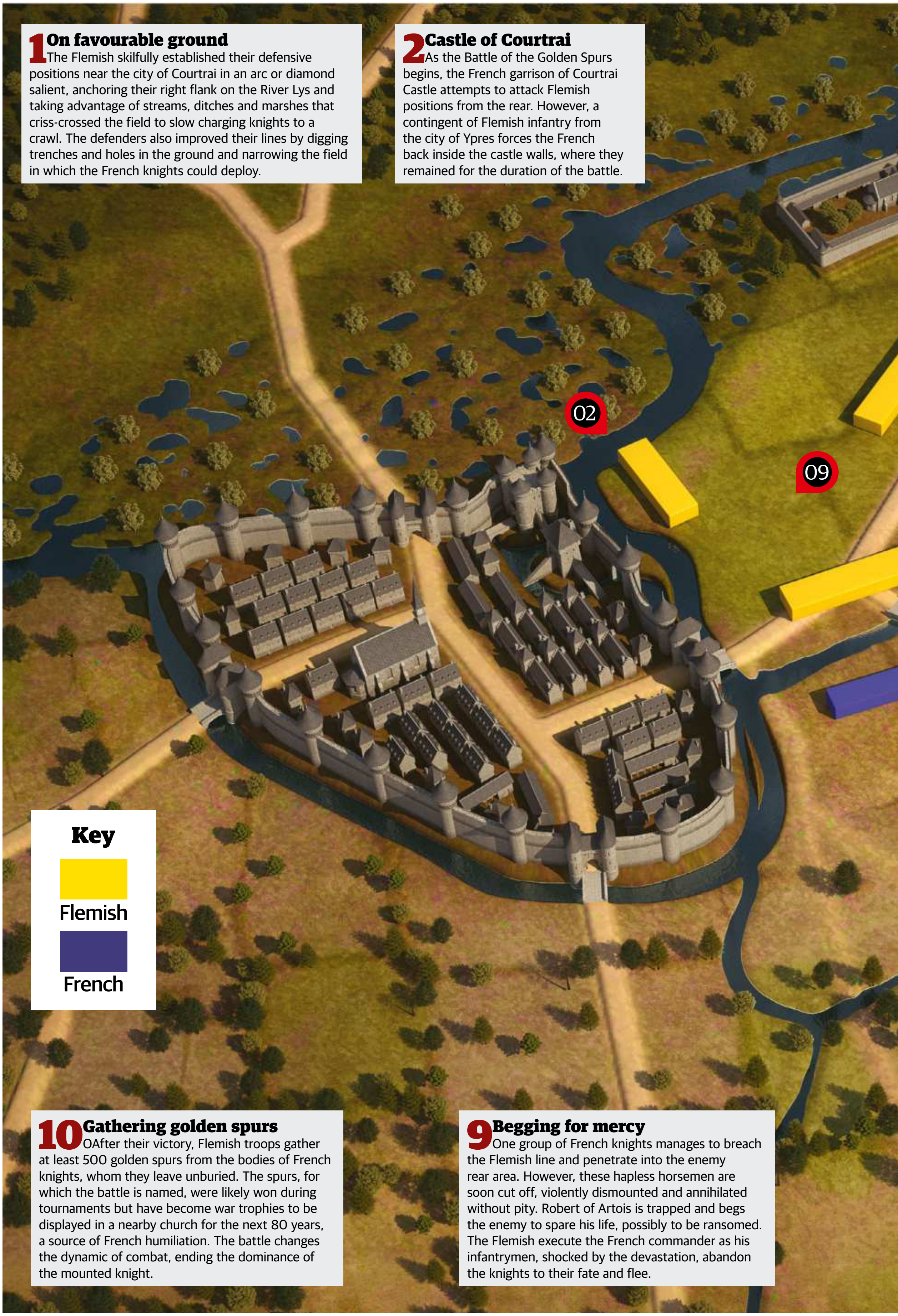
Pike

Key weapon

A long pole with a sharp multipoint spike attached, the pike was a standard medieval weapon.

Strengths: Penetrating power against charging enemy forces.

Weaknesses: Very difficult to use if the opponent gets past the weapon's effective range.



1 On favourable ground
The Flemish skilfully established their defensive positions near the city of Courtrai in an arc or diamond salient, anchoring their right flank on the River Lys and taking advantage of streams, ditches and marshes that criss-crossed the field to slow charging knights to a crawl. The defenders also improved their lines by digging trenches and holes in the ground and narrowing the field in which the French knights could deploy.

2 Castle of Courtrai
As the Battle of the Golden Spurs begins, the French garrison of Courtrai Castle attempts to attack Flemish positions from the rear. However, a contingent of Flemish infantry from the city of Ypres forces the French back inside the castle walls, where they remained for the duration of the battle.

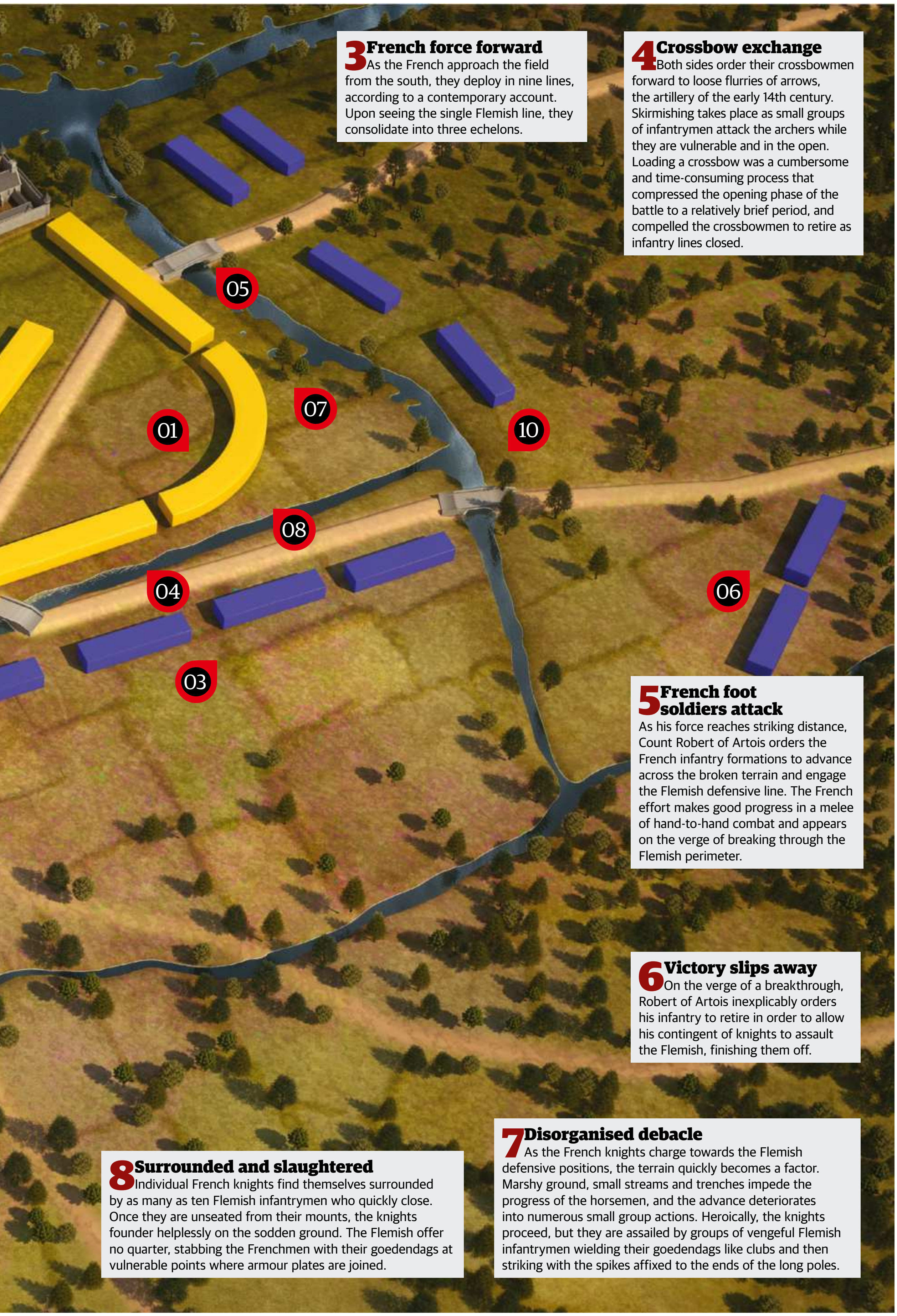
Key

🟨 Flemish

🟪 French

10 Gathering golden spurs
OAfter their victory, Flemish troops gather at least 500 golden spurs from the bodies of French knights, whom they leave unburied. The spurs, for which the battle is named, were likely won during tournaments but have become war trophies to be displayed in a nearby church for the next 80 years, a source of French humiliation. The battle changes the dynamic of combat, ending the dominance of the mounted knight.

9 Begging for mercy
One group of French knights manages to breach the Flemish line and penetrate into the enemy rear area. However, these hapless horsemen are soon cut off, violently dismounted and annihilated without pity. Robert of Artois is trapped and begs the enemy to spare his life, possibly to be ransomed. The Flemish execute the French commander as his infantrymen, shocked by the devastation, abandon the knights to their fate and flee.



3 French force forward

As the French approach the field from the south, they deploy in nine lines, according to a contemporary account. Upon seeing the single Flemish line, they consolidate into three echelons.

4 Crossbow exchange

Both sides order their crossbowmen forward to loose flurries of arrows, the artillery of the early 14th century. Skirmishing takes place as small groups of infantrymen attack the archers while they are vulnerable and in the open. Loading a crossbow was a cumbersome and time-consuming process that compressed the opening phase of the battle to a relatively brief period, and compelled the crossbowmen to retire as infantry lines closed.

5 French foot soldiers attack

As his force reaches striking distance, Count Robert of Artois orders the French infantry formations to advance across the broken terrain and engage the Flemish defensive line. The French effort makes good progress in a melee of hand-to-hand combat and appears on the verge of breaking through the Flemish perimeter.

6 Victory slips away

On the verge of a breakthrough, Robert of Artois inexplicably orders his infantry to retire in order to allow his contingent of knights to assault the Flemish, finishing them off.

7 Disorganised debacle

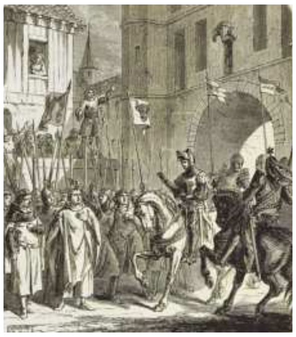
As the French knights charge towards the Flemish defensive positions, the terrain quickly becomes a factor. Marshy ground, small streams and trenches impede the progress of the horsemen, and the advance deteriorates into numerous small group actions. Heroically, the knights proceed, but they are assailed by groups of vengeful Flemish infantrymen wielding their goedendags like clubs and then striking with the spikes affixed to the ends of the long poles.

8 Surrounded and slaughtered

Individual French knights find themselves surrounded by as many as ten Flemish infantrymen who quickly close. Once they are unseated from their mounts, the knights founder helplessly on the sodden ground. The Flemish offer no quarter, stabbing the Frenchmen with their goedendags at vulnerable points where armour plates are joined.

Flemish Army

Troops 9,000
Knights 200

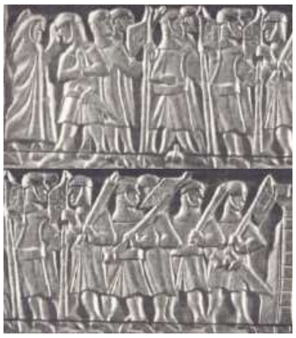


William of Jülich
Leader

Perhaps motivated by revenge, William of Jülich received a grand welcome as he arrived to assist Flemish arms.

Strengths: Popular with his troops and solid tactician.

Weaknesses: Little experience in actual combat situations.



Flemish Infantrymen
Key Unit

Although they were not professional soldiers, the Flemish infantry were well trained and well led at Courtrai.

Strengths: Disciplined and committed to their cause.

Weaknesses: Despite training, they lacked the experience of professional soldiers.

Goedendag
Key Weapon

A regional weapon, the goedendag consisted of a three- to five-foot pole topped with an iron spike.

Strengths: Effective as a club or thrusting weapon.

Weaknesses: Close-quarter weapon sometimes difficult to withdraw from target.

© Alamy, Getty

A century of blood and wrath

In the Hundred Years' War, England and France were embroiled in a series of bitter, bloody battles that re-shaped the future of the continent forever

The genesis of the longest-running conflict in European history finds its origins, like so many wars before and after it, in the eternal struggle for territory and an insatiable thirst for power. Ever since William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy, claimed the English crown as his own, the monarchs of England had a legitimate claim to lands and titles of note in the Kingdom of France. Over time these lands were reduced by a long line of French kings, but England continued to hold a stake in the future of its neighbour.

For King Edward III of England, that investment in France ran deeper - to the Plantagenet monarch it was a birthright. The death of the heirless Charles IV of France provided Edward with the opening he needed, but an old Salic Law prohibited the order of succession passing through a woman (his mother was the sister of the French king), so the crown was awarded by the French Assembly to Philip of Valois. Philip VI wasted no time undermining his rival either, including funding an invasion of England by Scottish monarch David II. The invasion failed, but a French scheme so close to home enraged Edward. In 1337, in order to quell Edward's influence on his soil, Philip confiscated the largest English fiefdom on the French mainland, Aquitaine.

In response, Edward began forming alliances with key noble families, such as the Flemings and the Montforts, houses who cared little for the current French monarch. With Edward's own son - also named Edward and known later as The Black Prince - also conspiring on French soil to create more alliances for the English, the two nations rolled towards the first pitched confrontation of the Hundred Years' War - the Battle of Crécy.

On 26 August 1346, the armies of Edward arrived near the town of Crécy in Normandy. One month prior, the English king had landed 14,000 men on Normandy's shores and began ravaging the French countryside, razing villages to the ground. The armies of Philip rallied to respond, and a force of 12,000 met them at Crécy. Philip's army consisted of 8,000 mounted knights and 4,000 hired Genoese crossbowmen, while the bulk of Edward's force consisted of 10,000 English archers. Those archers, armed with the unique English longbow, would make all the difference.

When Philip's forces attacked first, hoping to catch the English by the surprise, Edward's longbowman filled the air thick with arrows and cut the charging cavalry down. The longbow also out-ranged the traditional bow designs of the French, enabling the English to significantly weaken Philip's army before the cavalry and infantry clashed. By the time night fell, more than a third of the French king's army had been cut down, including his own brother, Charles II of Alençon.

Edward's victory at Crécy effectively crippled the French army and left the way open for him to continue his campaign. By 1347, Calais had fallen and the English had established a key stronghold

Despite being referred to as a century-long conflict, the Hundred Years' War actually lasted for 116 years

“Led by the Black Prince, the English forces routed those of John II of France”

The war actually halted a number of times, mainly due to catastrophic outbreaks of bubonic plague and the Black Death

that would enable them to bolster their campaign with fresh soldiers and supplies. The death of Charles VI in 1350, and the spread of the Black Death in Paris and beyond only served to further the English cause.

The French army often kept its distance over the coming years, only blocking the advance of the English with pitched battles. The largest of these to follow Crécy was at Poitiers on 19 September 1356, and it proved a familiar echo of that first battle - a French army eviscerated by loosed English arrows and the fall from grace of the mounted charge. Led by the Black Prince, the English forces routed those of John II of France, with the French king himself taken prisoner.

The Black Prince died in 1376, and so when Edward III died the following year, the crown passed to his grandson, Richard II. Just ten years old when he inherited the throne, Richard continued the English acquisition of French lands. The damage rendered by the invading English kings was more than just economical or geographical - it destroyed any sense of French unity, as the nobility turned on one another. By 1407, the nation descended into civil war as the two most powerful branches of the royal family - the Houses of Orléans and Burgundy - fought for control of the throne.

While France fractured into civil turmoil, its armies were gathered together under Charles I of Albret, the Constable of France, to face the English in another decisive battle. Much like the French throne - which was now occupied by Charles VI, grandson of John II - the English crown had been worn through the bloody battles of the Hundred Years' War by a handful of kings, and its current royal claimant, Henry V, was ready to fight the battle that could potentially end the campaign for good. Like his predecessors, Henry believed himself the rightful heir to the French throne and he famously marched to victory on the fields of Agincourt on 25 October 1415.

Agincourt completed a trifecta of bloody pitched battles that crushed the forces of the French monarchy. Charles and Albret had managed to form the largest Frankish army of the conflict (estimates ranged from 12,000 to 36,000) and they outnumbered the roughly 6,000-9,000 men under Henry's banner. But Henry had learned the lessons of the war and the bulk of that number were English and Welsh longbowmen who pummelled the French archers and infantry. By the time, the French retreated they had lost between 7,000-10,000 men.

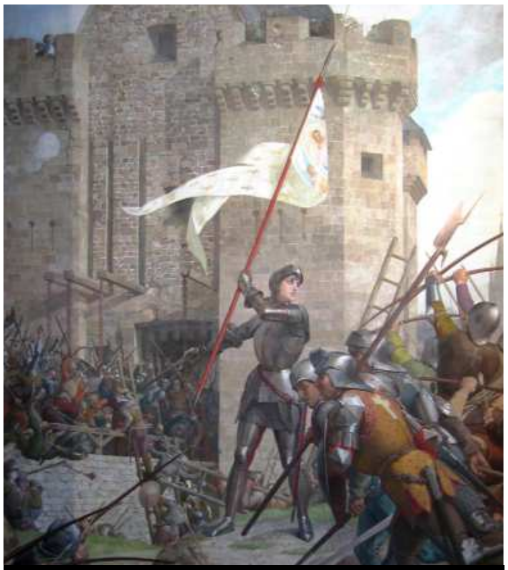
The loss at Agincourt forced Charles to recognise Henry as the official heir to the throne. With the country still racked by civil war, acknowledging the military might of Henry as king was, ironically, the most stable option for the nation. However, both Henry and Charles died within two months of one another in 1422, leaving the agreement in tatters. Both Henry's successor, Henry VI, and Charles' son, the Dauphin, made claims to the throne and it would be the under the latter that the war would truly change.

Henry VI's forces pushed for an advantage as they entered the region of Orléans. In September 1428, the English king's forces began besieging the tactical linchpin that was the region's namesake, but the attack seemingly faltered under the most unlikely of sources.

A peasant-born girl by the name of Joan of Arc had arrived at the court of the Dauphin claiming heavenly visions of his victory against the English. She was sent with a relief force and her rallying presence helped destroy the English army. Joan would be captured shortly after, but her subsequent execution by burning would only serve to fuel the fires of the French resurgence.

The martyrdom of Joan of Arc and the popularity of the Dauphin eventually led one of Henry VI's most important French allies, the Duke of Burgundy, to defect in 1435. Soon after, the Dauphin was officially recognised as Charles VII, King of France. The nation now had a Frankish monarch to rally behind, one not afraid to use new innovations such as the cannon to help negate the deadly power of the English longbow.

The unification of Orléans and Burgundy under a Valois monarch was the turning point of the conflict. As the years rolled by, Charles' forces grew stronger as he drove the usurpers further and further towards the coast. On 15 April 1450, the



Joan of Arc was a vital part of the French campaign during the Lancastrian era of the conflict, her efforts even seeing her canonised as a result

Defining moment

Onset of the Hundred Years' War 1336

Tensions between England and France had simmered with barely tempered rivalry, but hostilities began to rise when Philip VI is named King of France instead of the better connected King Edward III of England. Negotiations turn black when Edward offers refuge to a defector from Philip's court, Robert III of Artois. When Edward refuses to agree to Philip's demands, the French king reacts by taking control of the English-claimed French fiefdom of Guienne/Aquitaine. Edward does not react well and declares war on France, igniting the Hundred Years' War.

Timeline

1328

- **The death of Charles IV of France**
  Charles IV dies at Vincennes without a male heir to continue the House of Capet. His death creates a power vacuum that leads to his cousin, Philip of Valois becoming Philip VI of France.
  1 February 1328

1346

- **English victory at Crécy**
  The armies of Edward III of England claim a decisive early victory at the Battle of Crécy. The longbow plays a pivotal role and the battle effectively cripples the armies of France.
  26 August 1346

1356

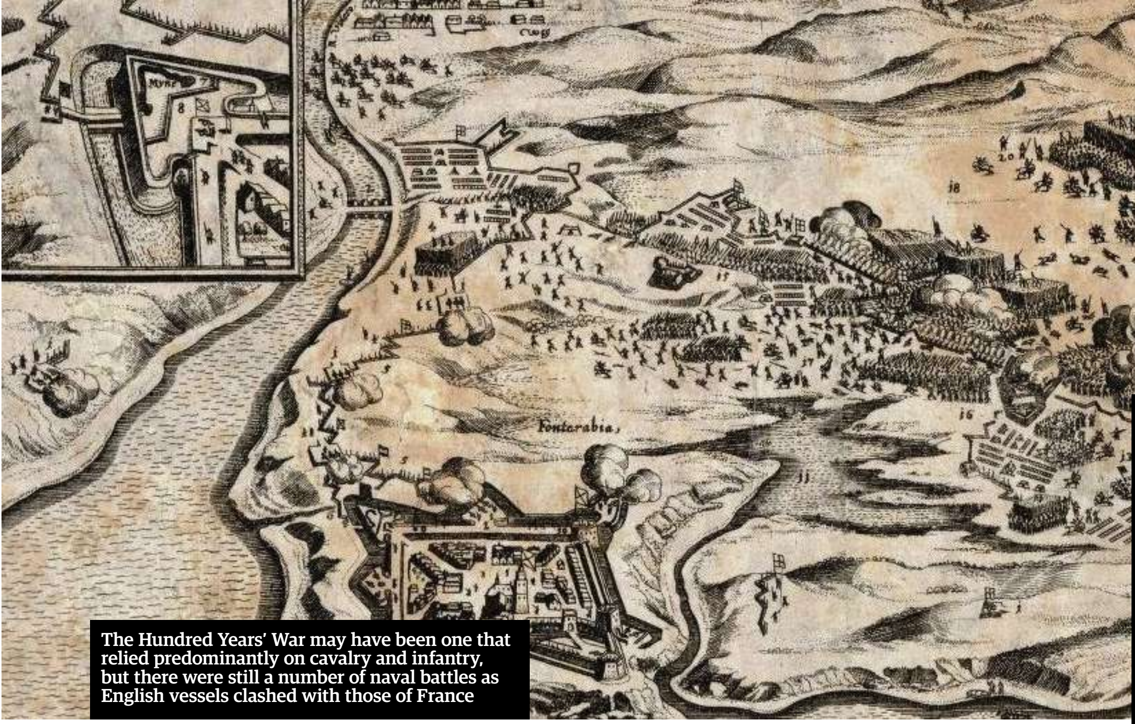
- **France crushed at Poitiers**
  The English claim another powerful victory against the French near Poitiers. The French suffer catastrophic losses and the French king, John II, is captured alive.
  19 September 1356

1407

- **French civil war erupts**
  When the brother of Charles VI of France, Louis of Orléans, is murdered on the orders of the king's son, John the Fearless, the nation descends into a bitter war for succession.
  23 November 1407

1415

- **Henry V triumphs at Agincourt**
  On the fields of Agincourt, Henry V of England claims the third of three decisive military victories over the French. His victory almost brings the conflict to an end.
  25 October 1415



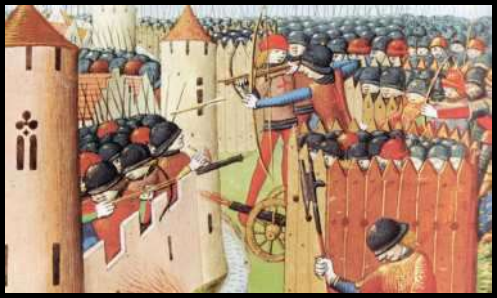
The Hundred Years' War may have been one that relied predominantly on cavalry and infantry, but there were still a number of naval battles as English vessels clashed with those of France

French clashed with the English at the Battle of Formigny and crushed the forces of Henry VI with cannon, arrow and blade. The loss at Formigny broke the English and by the end of 1453, both Castilian and Calais, the last vantage points of the English invasion were crushed. And so Charles brought the Hundred Years' War to an end with a river of English blood.

Following 116 years of a conflict that nearly tore Europe apart on more than one occasion, the continent would never be the same again. The loss of every single territory in France was a humiliation the national consciousness could not begin to comprehend, and it soon led to political infighting as Henry VI's power base crumbled. With the Plantagenet hold on the throne weakened by its warring Houses of Lancaster and York, Henry Tudor would ultimately seize power following the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485.

For France, the victories at the end of the Hundred Years' War were a bittersweet success. For the next years of his reign, Charles VII began rebuilding a nation that was now united under one banner. He introduced new reforms to taxation and social structure, enabling France to begin reigniting the grand scale of its economy. A popular man for most of his reign, the resounding success at the end of war gave Charles VII the opportunity to heal his kingdom following a century of war and civil conflict.

> The war had raged for so long that the kings of England and France were children, too young to bear the burden



The rise of gunpowder and guns in warfare

Think of famous battles such as the bloody encounter at Agincourt and the image of the longbow, cutting down ranks in their droves, springs to mind. It was a weapon that changed the course of the war, but it's easy to forget just how much military engineering transformed over those 116 years.

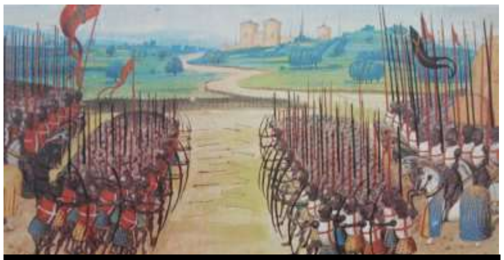
The introduction of gunpowder to the battlefields was a slow one, only serving to present a token sense of variety at Agincourt, but as the conflict entered its final years the use of artillery became a significant tactic. The first cannons were stationary, difficult to work and short of range, but by the 1380s artillery was mobile and could wipe out advancing troops like a burning hand of God.

The advancements in gunpowder improved fastest for the French, which was a significant influence during the war's final confrontations. Battles such as at Castillon in 1453, proved the French cannon to be more effective at a longer range, rendering the English longbow obsolete.

Defining moment

Treaty of Troyes is signed 1420

Following the decisive victory at Agincourt, the further acquisition of French territory by the English and the seemingly never-ending civil war France was forced to officially recognise Henry V's claims on the French throne. The issue of succession had led to the assassination of Charles VI's brother and the eventual disinheritance of the Dauphin, John the Fearless. With the throne left weakened in the wake of the king's growing bouts of madness, the official naming of Henry as heir was the best option France had to restore some semblance of order to the highest seat of office in the land.



One of the most famous battles of the 116-year-long conflict was the one fought on the fields of Agincourt, where two armies waged war with longbows

Defining moment

The Hundred Years' War ends

1453

With Charles VII's acquisition of Aquitaine and Normandy, English control in France is destroyed, the territory claimed by Henry V over three decades before lost in a series of military blunders and decisive defeats. France bands under the banner of Charles and seeks to make the nation whole again by besting an enemy that had conquered them at Agincourt. The loss of so much continental territory is a huge blow for the English and leads to years of conflict between the Houses of Lancaster and York, culminating in the Wars of the Roses.

1429

Joan of Arc liberates Orléans
Joan of Arc, a peasant-born woman who claims heavenly visions sent her to support Charles VII of France, helps liberate Orléans from the English in the first true decisive victory for the French.
8 May 1429

1431

Joan of Arc is burned at the stake
Following her capture at Compiègne, the English and the Spanish Inquisition charge her with heresy and have her burned at the stake. She is just 19 years of age. She is later canonised.
30 May 1431

1435

The Treaty of Arras
Charles VII of France signs a treaty with England and Burgundy, effectively ending the civil war. France can finally begin to consolidate its resources into a single entity. The Hundred Years' War continues.
21 September 1435

1450

Cannons elevate the French
The use of artillery at the Battle of Formigny provides France with a powerful and defiant means of destroying the longbow-dependant armies of the English. English control in France is waning.
15 April 1450

1453

Battle of Castillon
A crucial victory for the French in Gascony near the town of Castillon-sur-Dordogne crushes the English forces in France, forcing them to retreat to their last true stronghold in Calais.
17 July 1453

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A clash of kings at Agincourt

At the height of the Hundred Years' War, Henry V claimed victory in one of the Medieval period's bloodiest battles

While his father, Henry IV, had been preoccupied with consolidating - and in the process effectively legitimising - his rule, his son, King Henry V of England, saw the opportunity to expand Britain's holdings by taking back lands he believed rightfully belonged to him, starting with France.

In 1415, he proposed to marry Catherine, the daughter of the French king Charles VI, in addition to audaciously demanding the handover of the Plantagenet lands of Normandy and Anjou as her dowry. Unsurprisingly, Charles refused this offer from the upstart young king, with one account claiming that he sent the young Henry a case of tennis balls - the message being that his time would be better spent playing games than attempting to invade France.

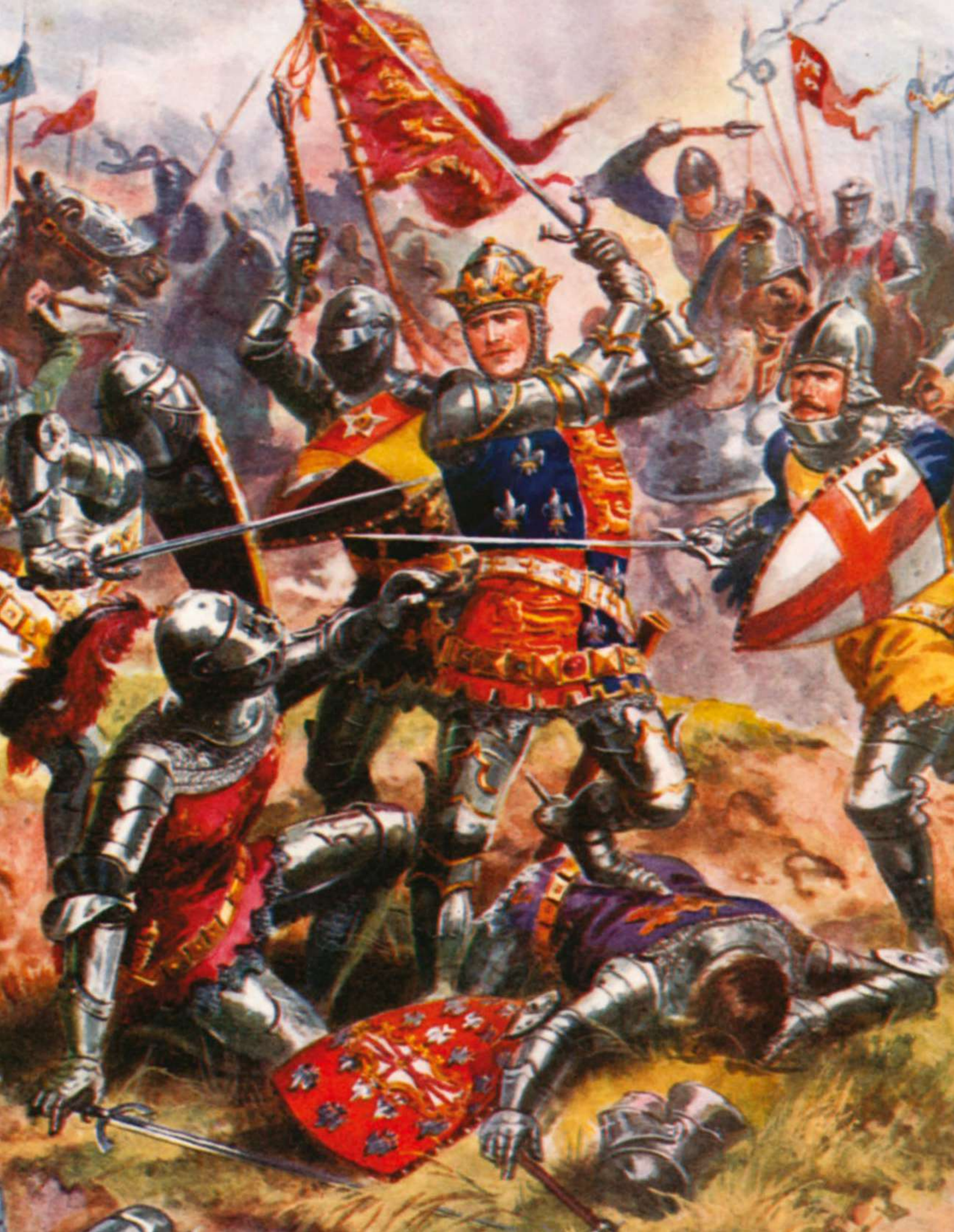
Unperturbed by Charles' taunting, Henry set sail for France, determined to capture the throne for himself. As well as the prospect of regaining the lost lands of his ancestors, success abroad would have the effect of galvanising support back home, and in the process focus attention away from his cousins' royal ambitions.

His success was almost instant. Immediately upon landing, he captured the port of Harfleur, although while on the way to the port of Calais, he found his path blocked by an army that substantially outnumbered his own. Faced with this much-larger French army, he put his superior tactical acumen to good use, decimating the French forces via the use of vast quantities of longbow archers to devastating effect. Between 7,500 and 10,000 French soldiers are estimated to have been killed according to various accounts, with about 1,500 noblemen taken prisoner, while the English forces' casualties are numbered at around 112, with high-ranking noblemen like the Duke of York and the Earl of Suffolk being counted among the dead. Even more French prisoners were originally taken, but in a show of calculated - but arguably justifiable - ruthlessness, Henry had ordered many of them to be put to death in order to avoid the possibility of them linking up with the remnants of the French forces in order to carry out a retaliatory attack.

Proving that this decisive victory was no fluke, Henry followed up this stunning victory with the conquest of Normandy - a campaign that lasted for three years. By June 1419, Henry controlled most of Normandy. Agincourt had not only been a military triumph; it had been a moral victory too, galvanising the English both abroad and at home.

Facing defeat, Charles agreed to the Treaty of Troyes, which formally recognised Henry as the heir to the French throne - at the expense of his own son - and finally allowed Henry to marry Catherine. Flushed with success, in February 1421 he returned to England for the first time in three and a half years, arriving in his homeland as a conquering hero.

His successful conquest of much of the country's hated enemy had made him extremely popular back home, and the Battle of Agincourt in particular would forever serve as a poignant example of his strength, tactical skill and ingenuity in battle - yet another example of the plucky underdog spirit and ability to triumph against the odds that British forces would go on to demonstrate in the future.



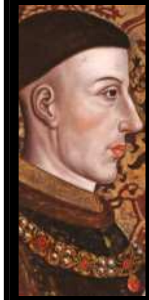
England

NUMBER OF TROOPS:

6,000-9,000

LONGBOWMEN: 5,000

KNIGHTS: 1,000



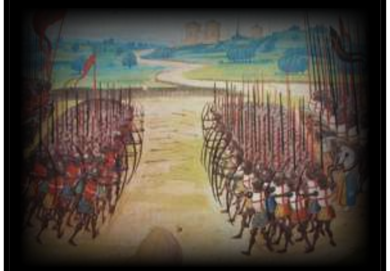
LEADER

KING HENRY V

King Henry was a skilled battle commander, leading his troops into battle and fighting alongside them.

Strengths Brave and experienced military leader.

Weaknesses His forces were numerically inferior to those of the French.



KEY UNIT

LONGBOWMAN

The effectiveness of the English longbowmen played a massive part in the success of the battle.

Strengths Long range and very difficult to attack.

Weaknesses Relatively poorly armoured and vulnerable if attacked.

KEY WEAPON

LONGBOW

The longbow's six arrows per minute could wound at 360m (1,200ft), kill at 180m (600ft) and even penetrate armour as far as 90m (300ft).

Strengths Accurate and destructive in large numbers.

Weaknesses Finite number of arrows available to them.

01 Camping for the night

On 24 October, about 48 kilometres (30 miles) from Calais in the town of Frévent, English scouts reported an immense French army blocking the road ahead. Seeing that they could not pass without meeting them in battle, Henry ordered his forces to camp there for the night.

02 Taking their positions

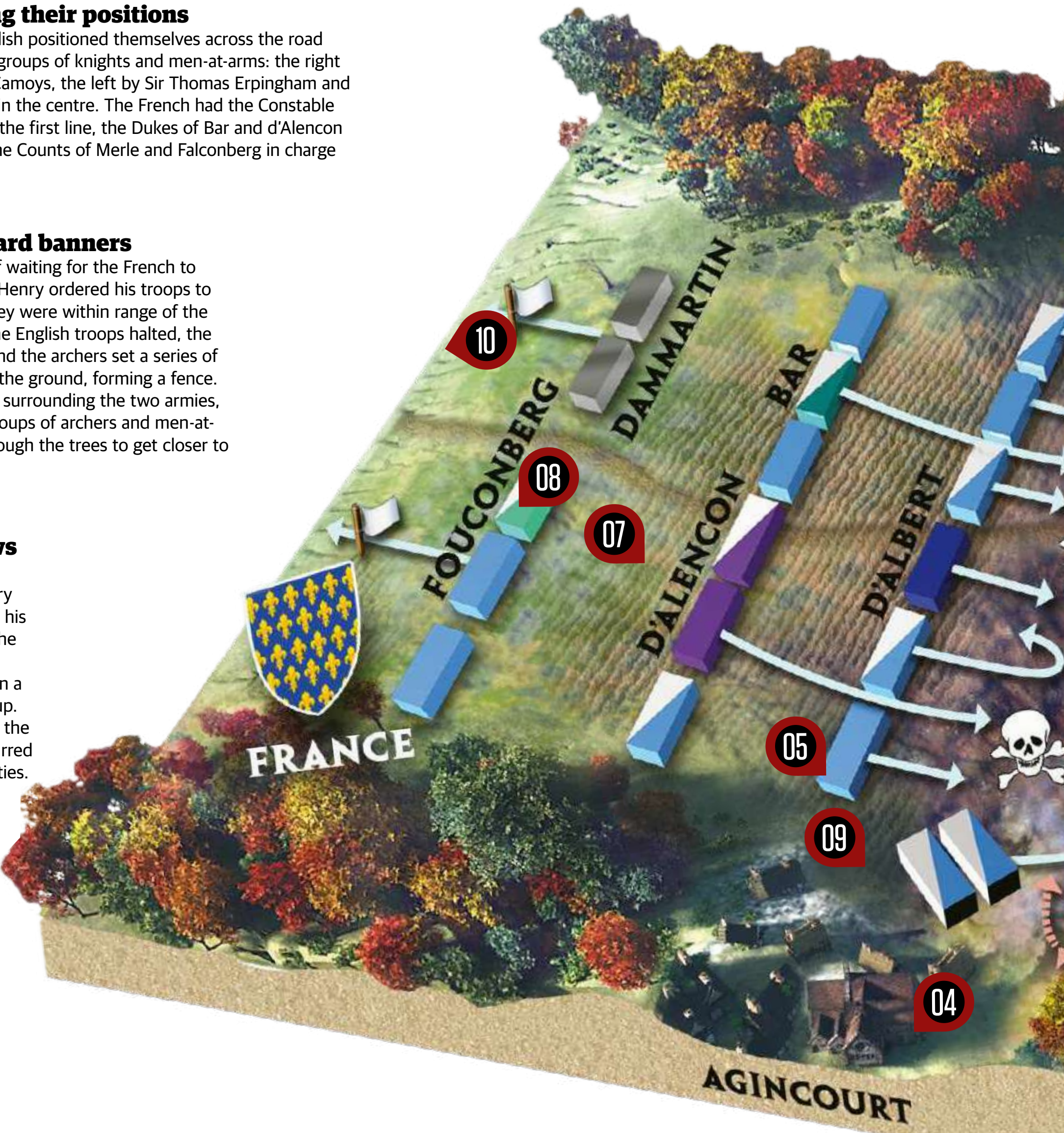
The English positioned themselves across the road to Calais in three groups of knights and men-at-arms: the right side led by Lord Camoys, the left by Sir Thomas Erpingham and the Duke of York in the centre. The French had the Constable of France leading the first line, the Dukes of Bar and d'Alencon the second and the Counts of Merle and Falconberg in charge of the third.

03 Forward banners

Bored of waiting for the French to begin the attack, Henry ordered his troops to advance. Once they were within range of the French archers, the English troops halted, the divisions closed and the archers set a series of pointed stakes in the ground, forming a fence. Within the woods surrounding the two armies, Henry directed groups of archers and men-at-arms to move through the trees to get closer to the French.

04 Arrows away

Shortly after, Henry gave the order for his archers to shoot the French, who were massed together in a big, unwieldy group. Taken by surprise, the French forces incurred very heavy casualties.



05 French attempt to move forward

After the shock of this assault, the French forces tried to advance in order to take the battle to the English. However, having already suffered massive casualties, they were impeded by the dead and dying horses and men already shot down in front of them. Reduced to walking pace, they were easily picked off by the English archers concealed in the woodlands on the flanks.

06 Archers join the fray and flanks

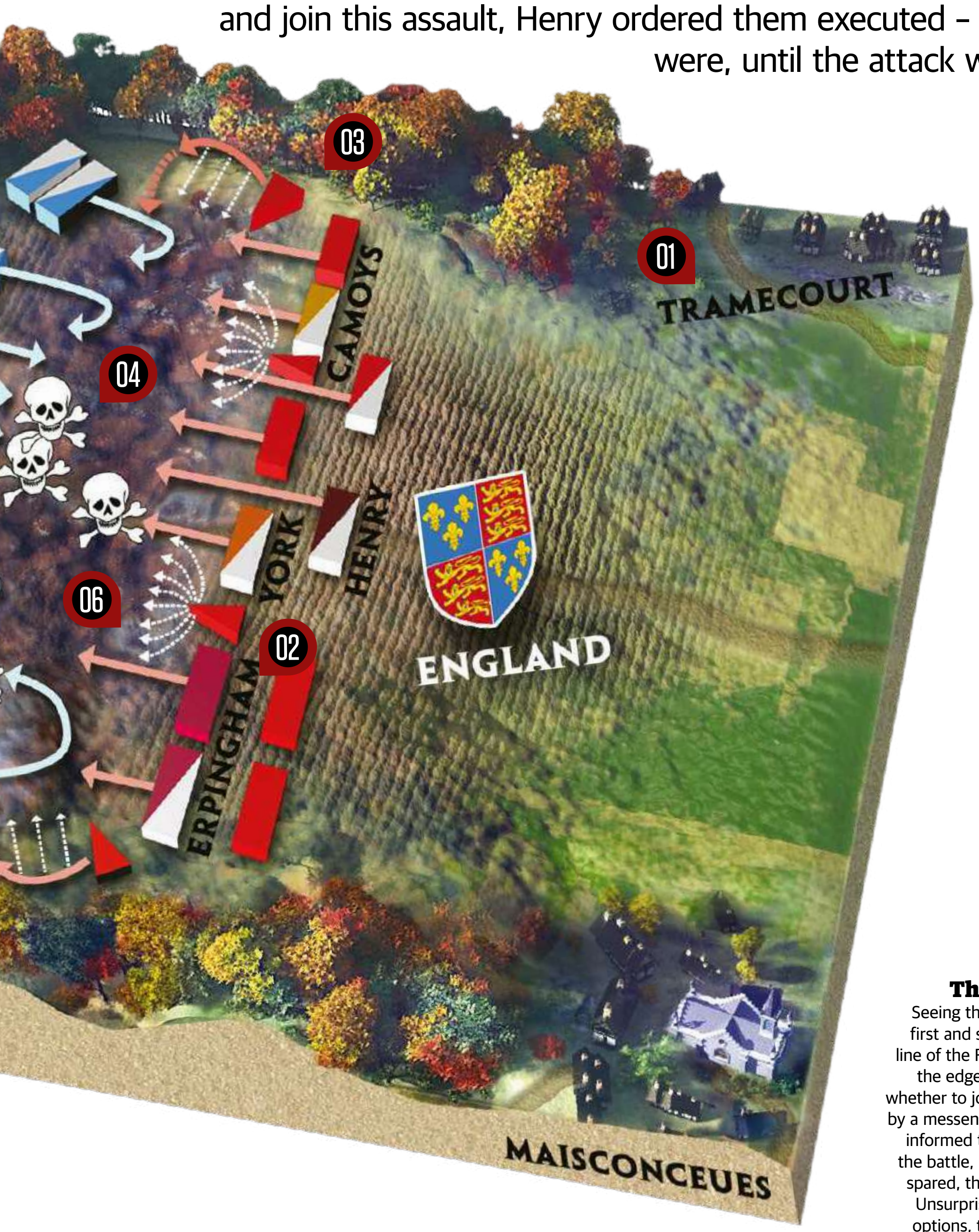
With the battle continuing along the fence of stakes, the English archers abandoned their positions and joined the knights in fighting against the French cavalry forces – most of which had been forced to dismount – which were reinforced by soldiers attacking on the flanks.

10 French camp ransacked

With the battle over and any local resistance crushed, the English troops ransacked the largely abandoned French camp, having secured a victory that would live on in legend.

09 Local French force attacks baggage

Although the main battle was over, it threatened to reignite when a local French force circumvented the forest and attacked the English baggage. Fearing the substantial amount of prisoners would rebel and join this assault, Henry ordered them executed – which many were, until the attack was repelled.



08

Third line retreats

Seeing the fate that had met the first and second waves, the third line of the French forces waited on the edge of the field, pondering whether to join. After being greeted by a messenger sent by Henry, who informed them that if they joined the battle, none of them would be spared, they made their decision. Unsurprisingly, considering their options, they left the battlefield.

07 French second line moves forward

The French second line, led by D'Alencon, moved forward in earnest to assist the beleaguered first line, but was overwhelmed in a similar fashion. Seeing the futility in continuing, he attempted to surrender to Henry, but was killed before he could reach the king.

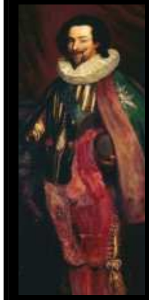
France

NUMBER OF TROOPS:

36,000

LONGBOWMEN: 1,200

KNIGHTS: 8,800



LEADER

CHARLES D'ALBRET

The former Constable of France co-commanded the French army alongside Jean le Maingre.

Strengths
Experienced soldier.

Weaknesses Low social rank, so orders were ignored by noblemen.

KEY UNIT

KNIGHTS

Much of the French forces consisted of heavy infantry, making them tough adversaries in open combat.

Strengths Heavily armoured and effective at hand-to-hand fighting.

Weaknesses Slow, cumbersome and easy to pick off by archers.

KEY WEAPON

HORSES

A large numbers of knights on horseback often presented a fearful sight for their opponents across the field.

Strengths Fast and powerful opponents in battle.

Weaknesses Cramped and boggy locations made them useless.

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Wars of the Roses

In war, blood is power, blood is family, blood is everything. England's Wars of the Roses split a country in two and left the bones of its people scattered across its green and pleasant lands

Both the House of Lancaster and the House of York were descended from Edward III

It was 1453 and England was still at war with its old enemy France. Since the legendary days of King Henry V, the warrior king who spilled the blood of the noble enemy in spades at Agincourt and secured England's claim to the tactically important province of Normandy, both great western powers had been fighting nonstop, with England slowly but surely being pushed back toward the English Channel. English King Henry VI's military affairs were being overseen by the Duke of Somerset Edmund Beaufort, an experienced military commander who was about to suffer the ignobility of losing Bordeaux and leaving Calais as England's only remaining territory on the continent.

Back in England, Henry VI - shy, pious and noncombatant - was busy being dominated by his powerful and ruthless wife, Margaret of Anjou, the niece of the French King Charles VII, as well as his feuding court nobles, with Henry cow-towing to both and leaving the affairs of England and his estate in a paralysing limbo. Amid this turmoil, a year previously the Duke of York, Richard Plantagenet, had travelled to London with an army to present the court with a list of grievances that they and the king were failing to address. This potentially explosive situation had been handled by Margaret and with the news that she was now pregnant, it helped to re-isolate York and force him to leave the capital with his tail between his legs.

When King Henry VI was told of the final loss of Bordeaux he suffered a mental breakdown. Completely unaware of who he was, what was going on around him and how to act toward people, Henry finally let the last tentative grip of control he had over England slip through his fingers. No longer was Henry the softly spoken and thoughtful king of old, but instead a dazed half-man, stumbling around court, unable to speak cogently and liable to sudden bouts of hysteria and aggressive confusion.

Henry's ethereal grasp on reality would go on to last an entire year. Margaret dealt with him as best she could, shielding him from the circling vultures at court and making all decisions regarding the rule of the nation for him. However, even she couldn't shield him from his own demons, with the king repeatedly heard screaming in the depths of night and continuously stricken with bouts of amnesia. When Margaret eventually gave birth to their son Edward, Henry's mental state was so deteriorated he didn't recognise him. Due to this incapacity, even his wilful and powerful wife Margaret was unable to stop the return of the

© Illustration: Joe Cummings

Duke of York and his supporters, a group that now included Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick, one of England's major financial and political powers. A Council of Regency was set up and power taken by Richard as Lord Protector of England. Once installed, he immediately imprisoned his old enemy, the Duke of Somerset, and backed all nobles opposing Henry, shifting the balance of court in his favour. The weak king had seemingly been deposed.

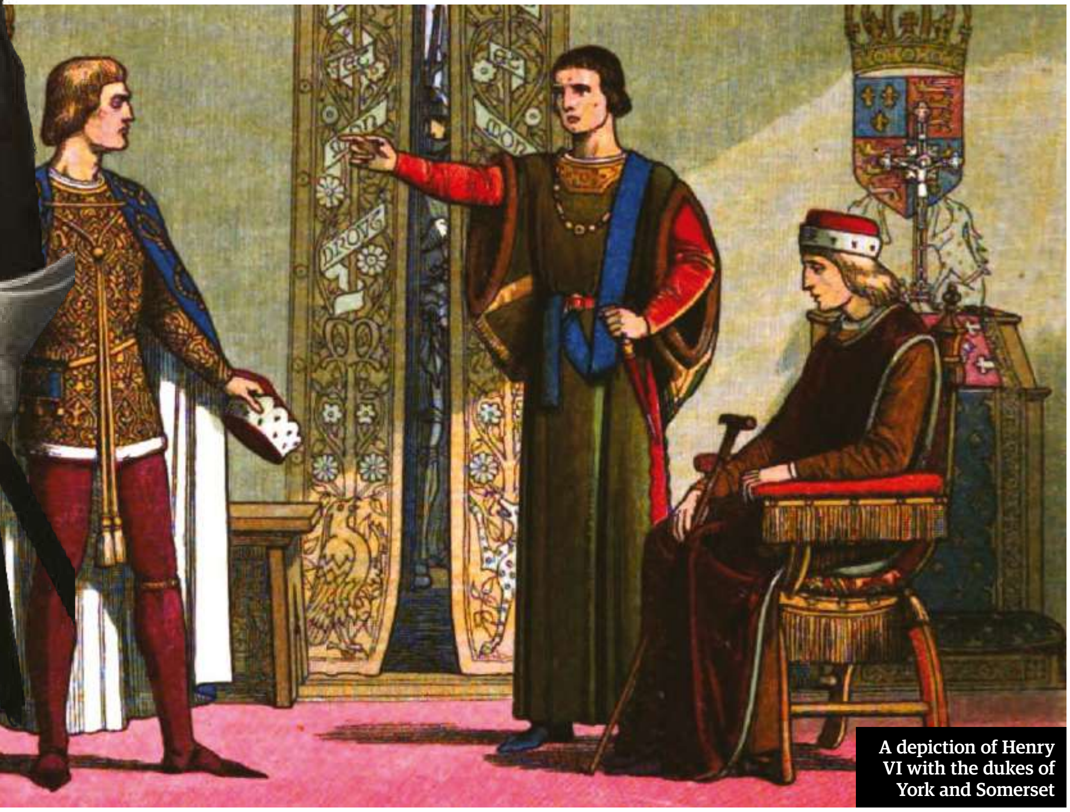
While the king was still alive – even if he was sometimes little more than a gibbering wreck – Richard's position was always perilous and when, on Christmas Day 1454, Henry suddenly and inexplicably regained his senses the balance of power in this game of thrones shifted yet again. The king had gone from not being able to recognise anyone, laughing maniacally on his own to the quiet and shy ruler of old almost overnight. With Henry now recovered, his queen lost no time in challenging York for the throne and quickly re-established Henry and herself at the centre of court. Never one to shy away from a confrontation – and well aware of the danger he presented – the queen began scheming to remove Richard from his reduced but still influential position, colluding with other nobles to discredit him and undermine his power and influence.

Margaret knew how to work the political system, which relied largely on the noble households. Richard soon found himself increasingly bypassed when it came to decisions, relegated away from London and, harried by Margaret at every turn, he found his allies slipping away. Finally, in early-1455, he decided that enough was enough and anticipating impending arrest for treason, raised an army and marched toward London. By the standards of the military might that was to come, this army of roughly 7,000 men may have been small, but there was nothing small in the statement that it made: the battle lines between the two great noble houses of England and their supporters had been drawn and the country held its breath, preparing to be plunged headfirst into chaos.

Richard Plantagenet was now not just contending for control at court but as the nation's king, and his loyal nobles gathered round him as the leader and figurehead of the House of York. Opposing him directly was Margaret of Anjou and her king, with the former now effectively the leader of the House of Lancaster. While the split in support for the two opposing sides wasn't just decided by geography, with nobles from all parts of the country siding with one house or the other due to a series of complex and often long-standing allegiances, although with Richard marching down from the north where he had recruited much of his army, it seemed like the north was coming to claim what it believed was rightfully its property in the south. To many of the nobles supporting the House of York they were marching on the capital with their knights, infantrymen and archers to remove a weak king from power and restore order to a country on the verge of disintegration and collapse.

Even the staunchest of Henry VI's supporters would have been forced to admit the country had seen better days. Following a series of French victories over the English on the continent, they had grown confident and had begun raiding English supply lines and vessels in the Channel. In addition, due to the years of warfare England

> "Completely unaware of who he was […] Henry finally let the last tentative grip of control he had over England slip through his fingertips"



A depiction of Henry VI with the dukes of York and Somerset

Battle for the throne

The key players in the bloody quest for ultimate power

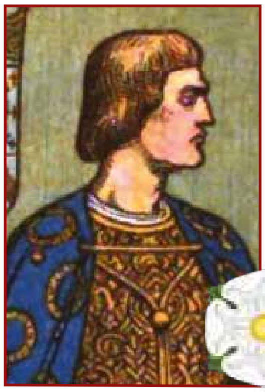
York

The second cadet branch of the parent House of Plantagenet, descended down the male line of the house from Edmund of Langley, the 1st Duke of York and the fourth surviving son of King Edward III. Three of its members down the ages became kings of the country. The house came to an end when Henry Tudor established the House of Tudor at the close of the Wars of the Roses.

Main supporters: Prince of Wales; Lord of Ireland; Dukes of York, Clarence, Gloucester.

Emblem: A white rose.

Claim to the throne: Richard Plantagenet was descended from King Edward III.



Richard Plantagenet

Duke of York

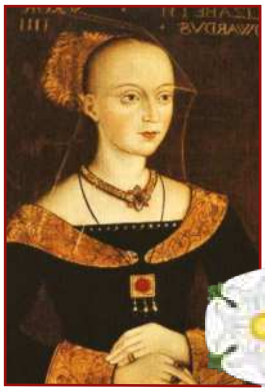
Date of birth: 21 September 1411

Strengths: Powerful and well connected; inherited large estates and influence in England and France.

Weaknesses: A series of military victories led him to overconfidence, ensuring his own death in a crushing defeat at the Battle of Wakefield.

POWER RATING:

● ● ● ● ○



Elizabeth Woodville

Queen consort

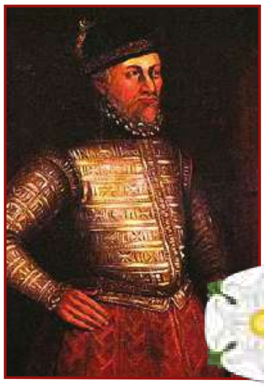
Date of birth: 1437

Strengths: Politically slick; married well above her station and was a renowned beauty

Weaknesses: Not powerful enough to hold the throne for her children; let her power be usurped by Lady Margaret Beaufort in later years.

POWER RATING:

● ● ● ○ ○



Richard Neville

Earl of Warwick

Date of birth: 22 November 1428

Strengths: A principal politician in England, he deposed two kings to earn the nickname 'the Kingmaker'.

Weaknesses: Let his dominant position at the English court be gradually eroded in later years due to directing his focus toward France.

POWER RATING:

● ● ● ● ●

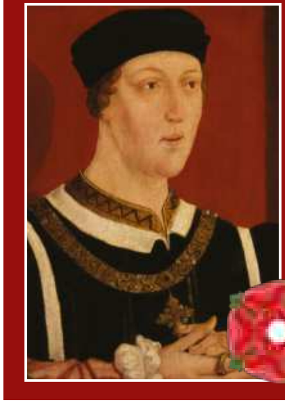
Lancaster

The first of two junior branches of the mighty royal House of Plantagenet, the House of Lancaster was created with the establishment of the Earldom of Lancaster by Henry III of England in 1267. From that date the House of Lancaster provided England with three kings, Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI before becoming extinct with the execution of the latter's son, Edward Prince of Wales, by the rival House of York during the Wars of the Roses.

Main supporters: Earls of Lancaster, Leicester, Moray, Ferrers, Derby, Salisbury, Lincoln; Duke of Lancaster.

Emblem: A red rose.

Claim to the throne: Its figurehead was Henry VI, the only son of Henry V.



Henry VI

King of England

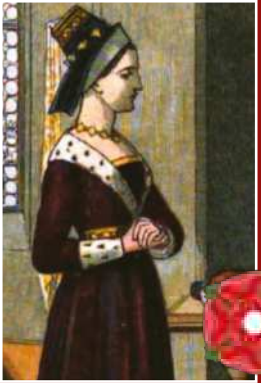
Date of birth: 6 December 1421

Strengths: Son of the powerful and popular Henry V; married well to Margaret of Anjou, was generally considered benevolent and pious.

Weaknesses: Bouts of crippling mental illness saw his kingdom ruled by others during his reign for extended periods of time.

POWER RATING:

● ● ○ ○ ○



Margaret of Anjou

Queen consort

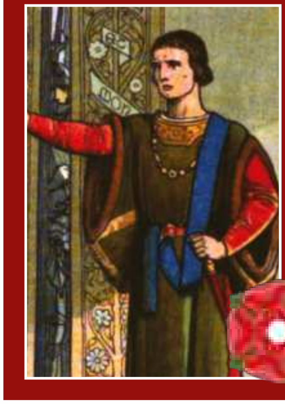
Date of birth: 23 March 1430

Strengths: Passionate, proud and strong-willed, Margaret provided the House of Lancaster the scheming and ruthless ruler Henry VI failed to be.

Weaknesses: Overstepped her power level in the Battle of Tewkesbury, leading to her ultimate fall from grace and power.

POWER RATING:

● ● ● ● ○



Edmund Beaufort

Duke of Somerset

Date of birth: 1406

Strengths: Head of one of the most influential families in England. Experienced and respected by his peers.

Weaknesses: Poor temperament, lost more battles than he won; let a personal feud with the Duke of York get violently out of hand.

POWER RATING:

● ● ● ○ ○

Two houses divided

Follow the family trees of two historic nobles' houses

House of York

Anne De Mortimer
1390-1411

The mother of Richard Plantagenet and grandmother of King Edward IV and King Richard III, Anne de Mortimer was descended from royalty through her mother and grandparents. She died of childbirth.

Richard of Conisburgh
1375-1415

The father of Richard Plantagenet and husband to Anne de Mortimer, Richard of Conisburgh was the 3rd Earl of Cambridge and a prominent figure in the Southampton Plot against Henry V. He was caught and executed.

Richard Plantagenet
1411-1460

The son of Anne de Mortimer and Richard of Conisburgh, Richard of York became a key Yorkist leader during the early parts of the Wars of the Roses, winning numerous battles and even becoming Lord Protector for a time.

Cecily Neville
1415-1495

The wife of Richard Plantagenet, Cecily Neville was the Duchess of York and was well known for her beauty and piety. She gave birth to two later kings of England, Edward IV and Richard III. She outlived her husband by 35 years.

Richard III
1452-1485

King of England for just two years, Richard III was the last king from the House of York and the last of the House of Plantagenet. Richard was famously defeated by Henry Tudor at the Battle of Bosworth Field.

Edward IV
1442-1483

The first Yorkist king of England, Edward IV ruled the country in two spells, from 1461 to 1470 and then after an overthrow and subsequent restoration, from 1471 to 1483. He was succeeded by his younger brother Richard III.

Elizabeth Woodville
1437-1492

Spouse of King Edward IV from 1464, Elizabeth Woodville was one of the most powerful women in England during the Wars of the Roses. She gave birth to the Princes in the Tower and Elizabeth of York, future wife of Henry Tudor, King Henry VII of England.

Edward V
1470-1483

One of the famous Princes in the Tower, Edward V was a son of Elizabeth Woodville and uncrowned king for just 86 days. He was succeeded infamously by his uncle and Lord Protector, Richard of Gloucester, later King Richard III of England.

Richard of Shrewsbury
1473-1483

The second son of Elizabeth Woodville and King Edward IV, Richard was the second famous member of the Princes in the Tower. Richard was almost certainly murdered along with Edward and disposed of in secret.

Elizabeth of York
1466-1503

The only daughter of Elizabeth Woodville, Elizabeth of York played a key part in ending the Wars of the Roses, marrying the Lancastrian ally Henry Tudor on 18 January 1486, establishing the Tudor Dynasty.

House of Lancaster

Owen Tudor
1385-1461

A Welsh soldier and courtier, Owen Tudor was descended from a Welsh prince, Rhys ap Gruffydd. After fighting at Agincourt he was awarded English rights and went on to serve in the household of Catherine of Valois after Henry V's death. They were possibly married in secret in 1429.

Catherine of Valois
1401-1437

Queen consort of England from 1420 to 1422, Catherine of Valois was the daughter of Charles VI of France. She was married to Henry V in 1420. In December 1421, she gave birth to the future Henry VI. Later, after Henry V's death, she went on to form a relationship with Owen Tudor.

Henry V
1386-1422

The famous warrior king of England who scored a famous victory over the French at the Battle of Agincourt, Henry V was the second English monarch to stem from the House of Lancaster after his father, King Henry IV.

Henry VI
1421-1471

Henry VI was the third king from the House of Lancaster. He became king at just nine months old. He suffered from periods of madness throughout his life and was deposed by Edward IV and the House of York.

Margaret of Anjou
1430-1482

The wife of Henry VI, Margaret of Anjou was the niece of Charles VII. Widely held to be responsible for the Wars of the Roses after excluding the Duke of York from the Great Council in 1455.

Edward of Lancaster
1453-1471

The only child of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou. After the battle of Towton he was exiled in France with his mother. He was killed in battle in Tewkesbury.

Edmund Tudor
1431-1456

Edmund Tudor was the first son of Owen Tudor and Catherine of Valois. Henry VI made him the Earl of Richmond in 1452. He married Margaret Beaufort in 1455.

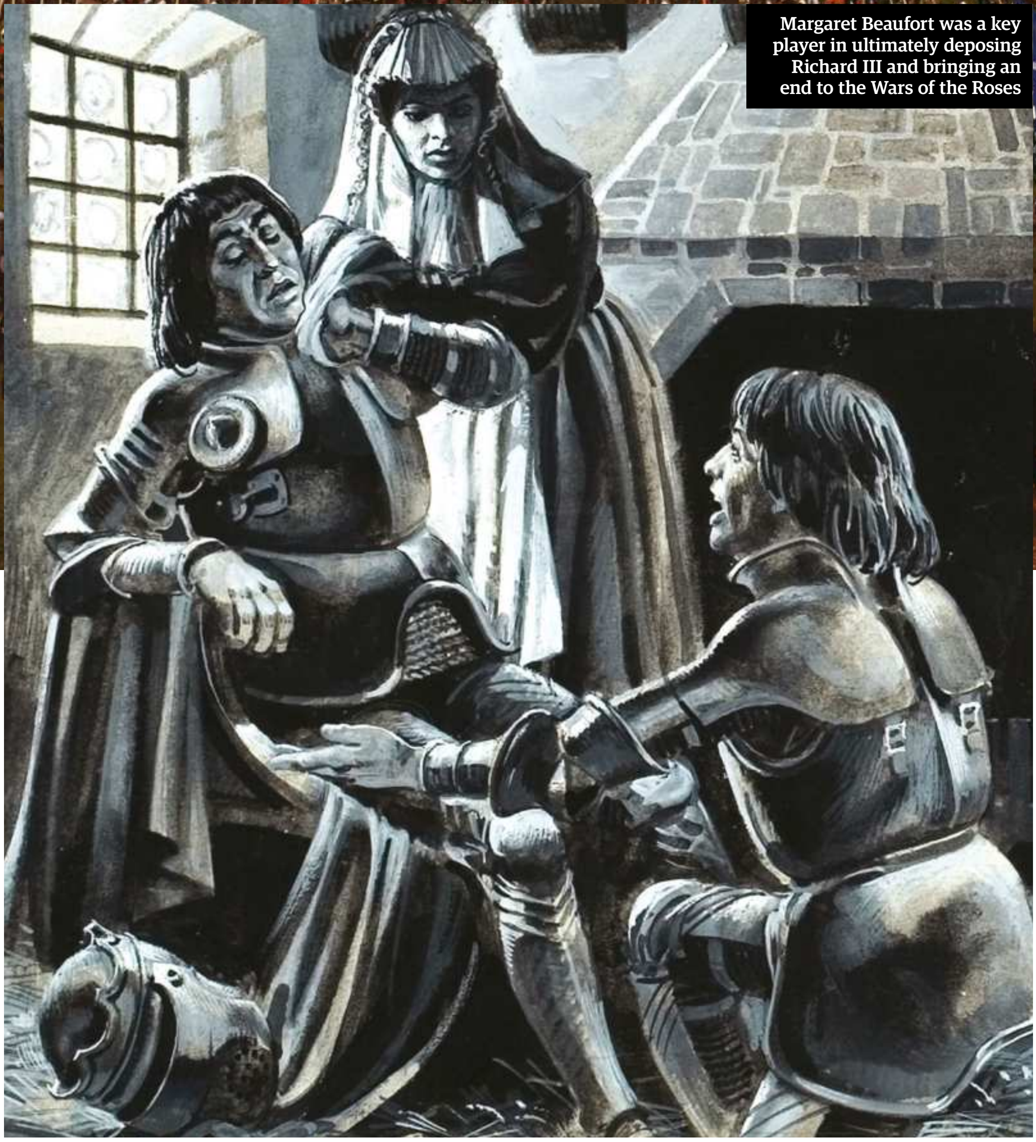
Margaret Beaufort
1443-1509

Margaret Beaufort was the daughter of the Duke of Somerset and the great-great granddaughter of King Edward III. She gave birth to the future Henry VII at just 13 years old.

Henry VII
1457-1509

The only child of Edmund Tudor and Margaret Beaufort, Henry VII spent years in exile before defeating Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth. He married Elizabeth of York, thus uniting the Houses of York and Lancaster, ending the Wars of the Roses.

Edward V and Richard of Shrewsbury (the Princes in the Tower) were imprisoned in the Tower of London and most probably executed



Margaret Beaufort was a key player in ultimately deposing Richard III and bringing an end to the Wars of the Roses

was in poor financial shape, while the absence of a strong king had led to London's political scene descending into a series of arguments, squabbles and petty confrontations. A weakened country was slowly bleeding to death from infighting, so in marching on the capital Richard Plantagenet intended to wrestle back some semblance of control over it.

The king might have been largely blind to the threat of the Duke of York but, luckily for the House of Lancaster, the ever-vigilant and ruthless Margaret was not. She quickly drummed up support for a hastily assembled army to counter the threat from Richard's forces. Margaret dispatched this army under the command of her favourite and a sworn enemy of Richard, Edmund, Duke of Somerset. The king was also sent along with the army and, judging by the comparatively small size of the Lancastrian army (roughly 2,000 men), it seemed Margaret expected that there would be no hostilities, with some sort of peace treaty the likely outcome and the status quo maintained. The beautiful and resourceful queen was wrong, though. And spectacularly so.

The two armies came together at St Albans just north of London on 22 May 1455, and after a couple of minor skirmishes, the first battle of the Wars of the Roses broke out. Richard's Yorkist force quickly cut down the Duke of Somerset as well as Lancastrian loyal nobles Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and Lord Thomas Clifford. Turning a defeat into a catastrophe, Henry VI himself was also captured, personally apprehended by Richard's key ally Warwick's forces as he hid in a local tanner's shop, abandoned by his advisers and servants and seemingly suffering from yet another mental breakdown.

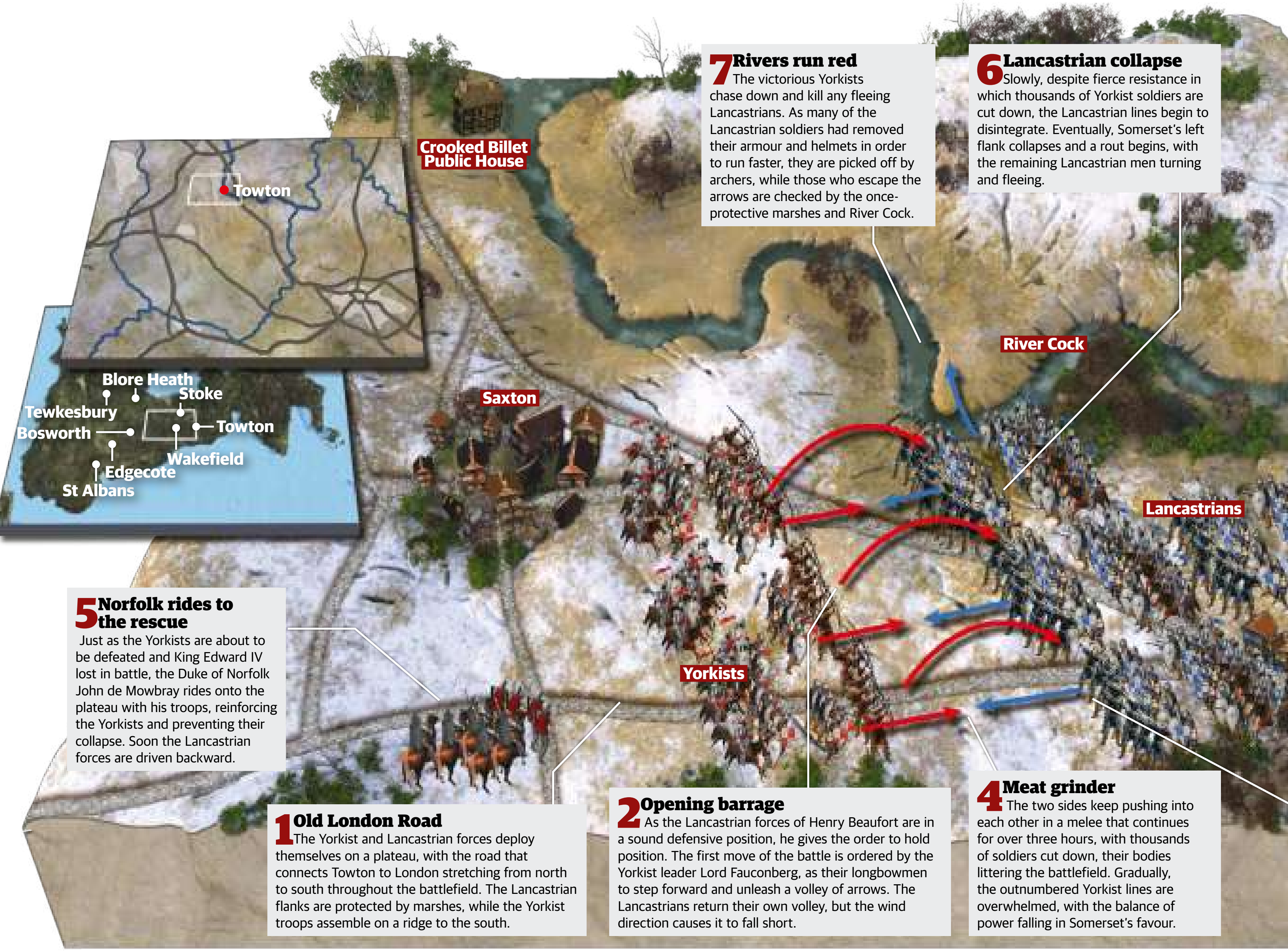
The following day, York and Warwick marched with the now-mad-again king in their custody to London. Redepositing the unfortunate Henry with Margaret, Richard then retook the position of Lord Protector and he and Warwick then began to re-establish themselves. An uneasy truce of sorts later followed, with both sides plotting to overthrow the other but failing to act decisively. Warwick became captain of Calais - an important and powerful position - but once again Henry VI recovered his mental strength and took his royal progress (a tour) into the Midlands in 1456, establishing his court in Coventry. By this point, the country effectively had two different kings, an unsustainable state of affairs. In this court, the third Duke of Somerset, Henry Beaufort was emerging as the favourite, with plans struck by him and Margaret to roll back all the appointments York had made while Lord Protector and to degrade Warwick's influence on state affairs. The turbulent situation was already balancing on a knife's edge; one sudden move, one perceived threat, and the whole country would rapidly descend into all-out civil war.

It took three years, but that the peace would end was as inevitable as the sun rising in the morning and setting in the evening. The move that would

> "Richard Plantagenet was now not just a contender for control of England but also its kingship, as the leader and figurehead of the House of York"

The bloodiest battle: Towton

Towton was not only the most brutal battle of the Wars of the Roses but also one of the most decisive. These are its climactic events:



1 Old London Road

The Yorkist and Lancastrian forces deploy themselves on a plateau, with the road that connects Towton to London stretching from north to south throughout the battlefield. The Lancastrian flanks are protected by marshes, while the Yorkist troops assemble on a ridge to the south.

2 Opening barrage

As the Lancastrian forces of Henry Beaufort are in a sound defensive position, he gives the order to hold position. The first move of the battle is ordered by the Yorkist leader Lord Fauconberg, as their longbowmen to step forward and unleash a volley of arrows. The Lancastrians return their own volley, but the wind direction causes it to fall short.

4 Meat grinder

The two sides keep pushing into each other in a melee that continues for over three hours, with thousands of soldiers cut down, their bodies littering the battlefield. Gradually, the outnumbered Yorkist lines are overwhelmed, with the balance of power falling in Somerset's favour.

5 Norfolk rides to the rescue

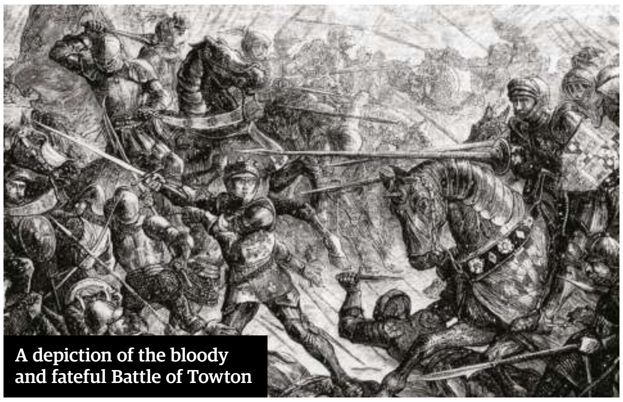
Just as the Yorkists are about to be defeated and King Edward IV lost in battle, the Duke of Norfolk John de Mowbray rides onto the plateau with his troops, reinforcing the Yorkists and preventing their collapse. Soon the Lancastrian forces are driven backward.

6 Lancastrian collapse

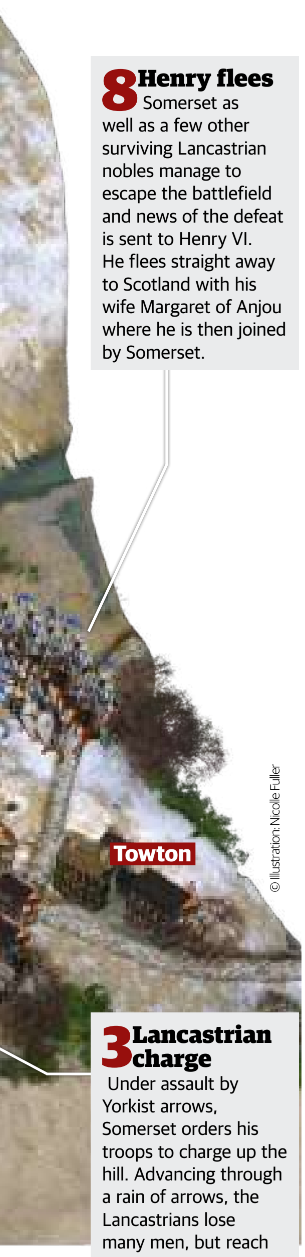
Slowly, despite fierce resistance in which thousands of Yorkist soldiers are cut down, the Lancastrian lines begin to disintegrate. Eventually, Somerset's left flank collapses and a rout begins, with the remaining Lancastrian men turning and fleeing.

7 Rivers run red

The victorious Yorkists chase down and kill any fleeing Lancastrians. As many of the Lancastrian soldiers had removed their armour and helmets in order to run faster, they are picked off by archers, while those who escape the arrows are checked by the once-protective marshes and River Cock.


A depiction of the bloody and fateful Battle of Towton

> "Edward joined forces once more with his father's old ally, 'the Kingmaker' Warwick, and rode forth toward the north armed with a deadly army of over 30,000 men"



© Illustration: Nicolle Fuller

8 Henry flees
Somerset as well as a few other surviving Lancastrian nobles manage to escape the battlefield and news of the defeat is sent to Henry VI. He flees straight away to Scotland with his wife Margaret of Anjou where he is then joined by Somerset.

3 Lancastrian charge
Under assault by Yorkist arrows, Somerset orders his troops to charge up the hill. Advancing through a rain of arrows, the Lancastrians lose many men, but reach the Yorkist lines and engage them in melee combat, cutting down hundreds of soldiers.

Lancaster

Troops: 35,000
Losses: Unknown (Total dead across both armies: 28,000)

Leader: Henry VI
Strengths: Strong claim to the throne of England, being the only child to King Henry V.
Weaknesses: Periods of debilitating insanity. Also quiet, shy and unsuited to warfare.

Key supporter: Duke of Somerset
Strengths: Experienced military commander with steady judgement.
Weaknesses: Political amateur; had a habit for switching sides.

Secondary unit: Footsoldier
Strengths: Numerous and gritty fighters when on the battlefield.
Weaknesses: Not always well trained or equipped enough.

York

Troops: 30,000
Losses: Unknown (Total dead across both armies: 28,000)

Leader: Edward IV of England
Strengths: Extremely capable and daring military leader. Good fighter on the battlefield.
Weaknesses: Poor foresight and inconsistent political judgement.

Key supporter: Lord Fauconberg
Strengths: Established military commander and knight. Politically savvy.
Weaknesses: Disloyal and mercenary.

Secondary unit: Longbowmen
Strengths: Fabulous range and stopping power with armour-piercing arrows.
Weaknesses: Vulnerable in melee combat and ineffective in poor visibility conditions.

The many wars of the roses

30 years of conflict mapped out on a bloody land

ST ALBANS 22 MAY 1455

St Albans saw Richard of York lead a force of over 3,000 soldiers on a direct course for London to take down Henry VI. Henry rode out to meet the Yorkist army and took up a defensive position at St Albans. Richard attacked the city with a great fury and defeated Henry. Queen Margaret and her young son Edward were forced into exile.

BLORE HEATH 23 SEPTEMBER 1459

Despite scoring a victory at St Albans, Richard's advance to London was halted. The Wars of the Roses rekindled themselves four years later when Richard, fearing his campaign was losing momentum, decided to centralise his forces around the town of Ludlow and launch a massive assault on the Lancastrians. Queen Margaret heard of the movement and dispatched her loyal Lord Audley to intercept. Despite Audley having roughly twice as many soldiers, he lost the battle and his life.

WAKEFIELD 30 DECEMBER 1460

With a large countering army assembled by the Lancastrians near the city of York, Richard took his forces north along with Richard Neville, Earl of Salisbury to intercept. Richard took a defensive position at Sandal Castle due to Lancastrians sporting a force close to 20,000, while his own forces numbered only around 10,000. Despite taking Sandal however, Richard decided to ride out and meet the Lancastrian forces directly. He was eventually overwhelmed and killed in battle. Richard Neville and Richard's son are executed.

TOWTON 29 MARCH 1461

A vast Yorkist force numbering 30,000 men fought the elements and a 35,000-strong force of Lancastrians at Towton. After hours of bloody fighting the Duke of Norfolk arrived with reinforcements at the last moment and the Yorkists won the day.

EDGECOTE MOOR 26 JULY 1469

Eight years on from the bloody battle of Towton, in which Edward IV had ruled unopposed, an army sent to put down an uprising was attacked by Lancastrian forces and quickly defeated, with the Earls of Pembroke and Devon killed.

TEWKESBURY 4 MAY 1471

The Lancastrian forces of the 4th Duke of Somerset, Edmund Beaufort, plotted a course for Wales. King Edward IV heard of the move and sent an army to intercept. The two sides met at Tewkesbury and, after Somerset attempted a failed break of the Yorkist lines and was countered, the Lancastrian force was routed, the Prince of Wales killed in battle, Somerset executed and Queen Margaret of Anjou captured.

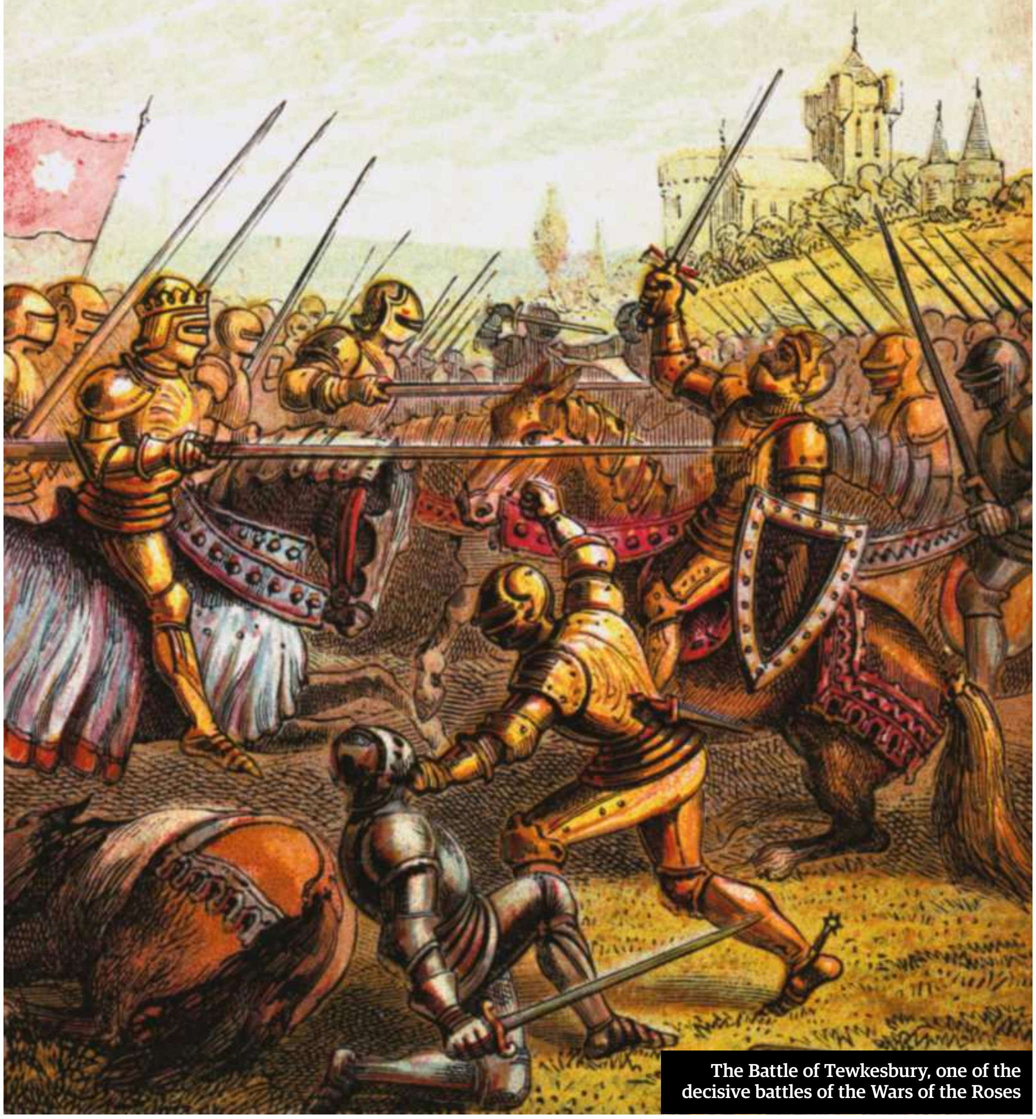
BOSWORTH 22 AUGUST 1485

Richard III had succeeded Edward IV as king. Henry Tudor had other ideas and landed in Wales on 7 August 1485 to take the crown. Richard heard of the invasion and moved to intercept Henry, the two forces eventually meeting south of Bosworth. During the ensuing battle Lord Thomas Stanley and Sir William Stanley switched sides from the Yorkists to the Lancastrians. As a result, Richard III was killed and Henry became King Henry VII.

STOKE 16 JUNE 1487

The last battle of the War of the Roses, Stoke was a final, wild roll of the dice for the remaining Yorkist forces. Bolstered by German and Irish mercenaries, Yorkist troops started to march toward London, but were met at East Stoke and obliterated. Its leaders were captured and imprisoned, its men killed and the last remnants of the Yorkist faction destroyed.

The Wars of the Roses pitted Yorkists against Lancastrians for over three decades



The Battle of Tewkesbury, one of the decisive battles of the Wars of the Roses

shatter the precarious peace came in 1459, when York and Warwick were summoned to a royal council in Coventry by Henry VI and Margaret and, fearing foul play and a potential threat to their lives, refused to go, instead grouping together with their supporters at Ludlow Castle. This was the starting pistol for the beginning of the bloodiest civil war England had ever seen. The Battle of Blore Heath was first, then the Battle of Ludford Bridge, followed by the Battle of Northampton and Wakefield. Each new confrontation saw thousands of men smash into each other, each thrust with a dagger or a sword that hit home a blow to the heart of the House of Lancaster or York. The balance of power shifted from one house to the other, but sometimes into nothingness, with no real victor.

These battles didn't just see commoners cut down in their thousands; for Richard Plantagenet, the Duke of York, Wakefield would be his final resting place. Decades of warfare had finally caught up with him. With Richard slain in battle and his second son Edmund and ally Richard of Salisbury captured and executed, Wakefield was one of the largest Lancastrian victories of the Wars of the Roses and a boon for the ageing but powerful Margaret of Anjou. Following Wakefield, the House of Lancaster pressed on, with their army returning south, outmanoeuvring Warwick's Yorkist army and defeating them at the Second Battle of St Albans. By now, all seemed to be lost for the House of York. With Richard Plantagenet dead and the Earl of Warwick having suffered a very bad defeat, the House of York desperately needed a figurehead to rally around and so Richard's first son, Edward of March, stepped into the breach. He had already defeated Jasper Tudor's Lancastrian army at the Battle of Mortimer's Cross in Herefordshire and, hearing of Warwick's defeat, joined his father's ally. The two of them and their armies then made a beeline for the capital. Margaret and Henry VI were not in London, as they were travelling northward, so the Yorkists entered the city unopposed and to a rapturous welcome. The welcome was so enthusiastic because Henry VI's incompetence as king had seen popular opinion sway in Edward's favour, and the common people had seemingly had enough of being under the Lancastrian ruler.

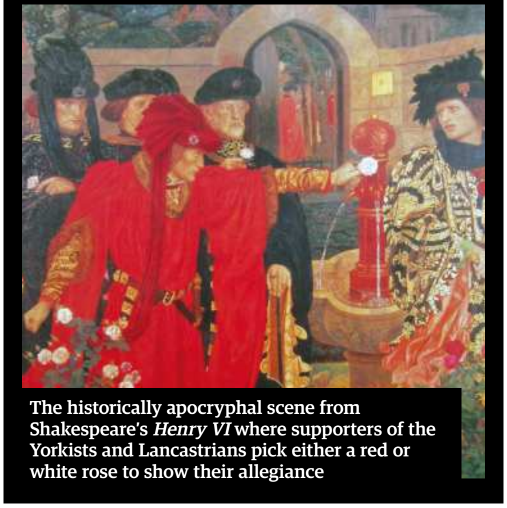
Such was the anti-Lancastrian mood that not only did Edward receive huge support from all of the Yorkist nobles around the city but he was unofficially crowned king in a very impromptu ceremony that was held at Westminster Abbey.

> "Importantly though, while Margaret and the House of Lancaster were down for the count, they were not down and out"

Wars of the Roses in popular culture

How has literature and film portrayed the events?

One of our main sources for information in popular culture on the Wars of the Roses is William Shakespeare's Henry VI trilogy, which charts the political machinations, fights and jealousies that tore the English political system apart in the mid-15th century. Indeed, the current name for the series of battles – Wars of the Roses – actually stems from Act 2, Scene 4 of the work, where the bickering lords are asked to show their allegiance to either Richard Duke of York or the rival Duke of Somerset by selecting either a red or white rose from a garden. This scene, despite its dubious historical accuracy – historians think it never took place – was later seized on Sir Walter Scott and popularised through his work Anne of Geierstein. The name, 'Wars of the Roses', therefore stuck and has proceeded to be used to describe the conflict since. Up until this point, the conflict had instead simply been referred to as the 'civil war'.



The historically apocryphal scene from Shakespeare's *Henry VI* where supporters of the Yorkists and Lancastrians pick either a red or white rose to show their allegiance

Edward knew though that while he had enjoyed the ceremony, he would never truly be king until Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou had been completely disposed of. Vowing to Parliament that he would not have a formal coronation until all pretenders to the throne had been crushed, he joined forces once more with his father's old ally, the 'Kingmaker', Warwick. Together they rode forth toward the north, leading a deadly army of over 30,000 men; their mission to take a proverbial hammer to the House of Lancaster and cut the head off its talisman.

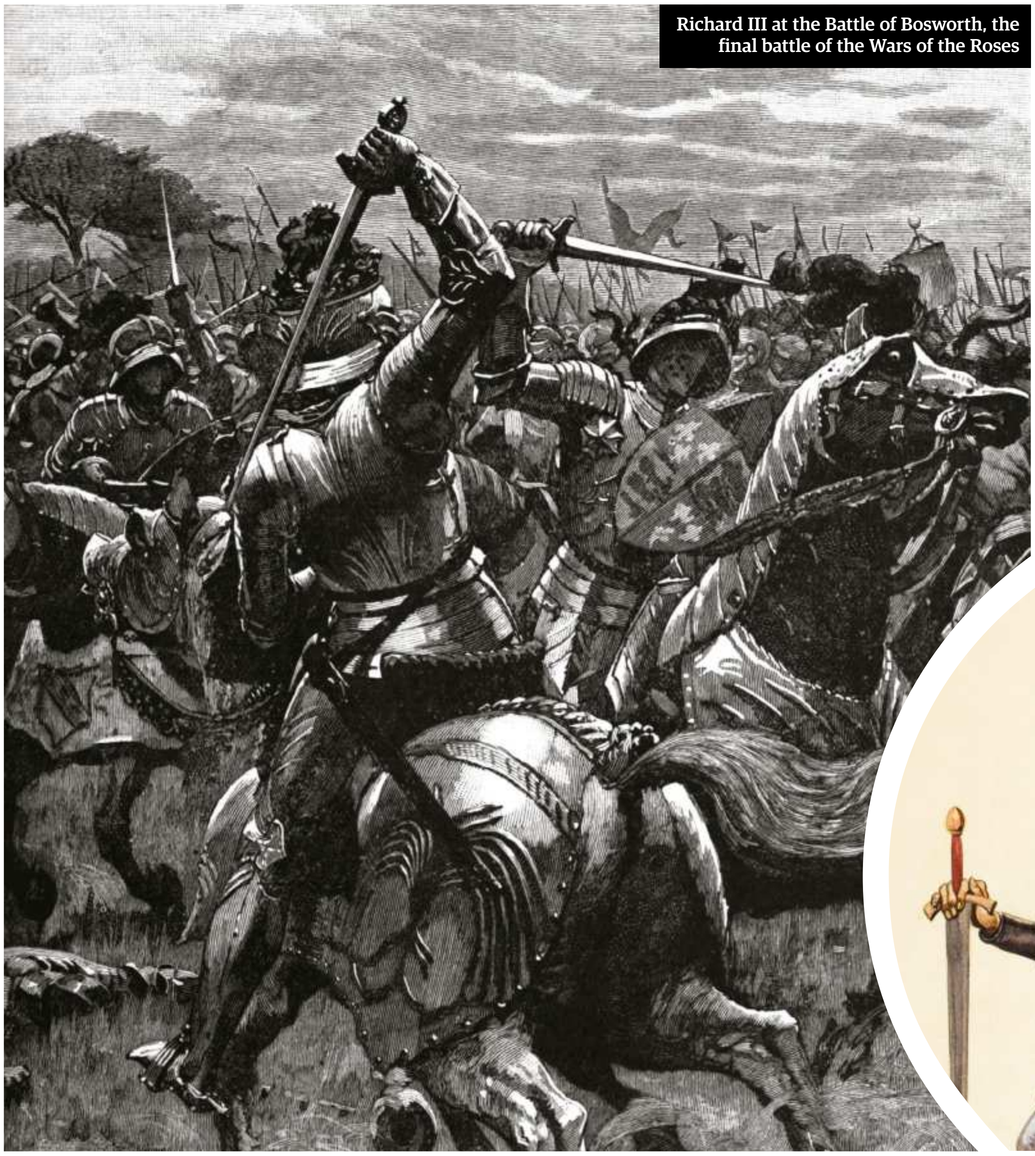
This already large army grew even more along the way, with more men and nobles drawn to Edward's cause as he marched toward Henry VI and Margaret, as he headed straight toward what was to be one of the bloodiest and most decisive battles in the entirety of the Wars of the Roses. Edward and his army was finally met by the House of Lancaster's great military commander Henry Beaufort, third Duke of Somerset, south of York at the village of Towton. Margaret had dispatched Somerset to put down the son of her old nemesis Richard Plantagenet once and for all. Beaufort turned up to the killing fields of Towton with an army of 35,000 soldiers just as the snow began to fall from the sky and settle on the ground that would see them do battle.

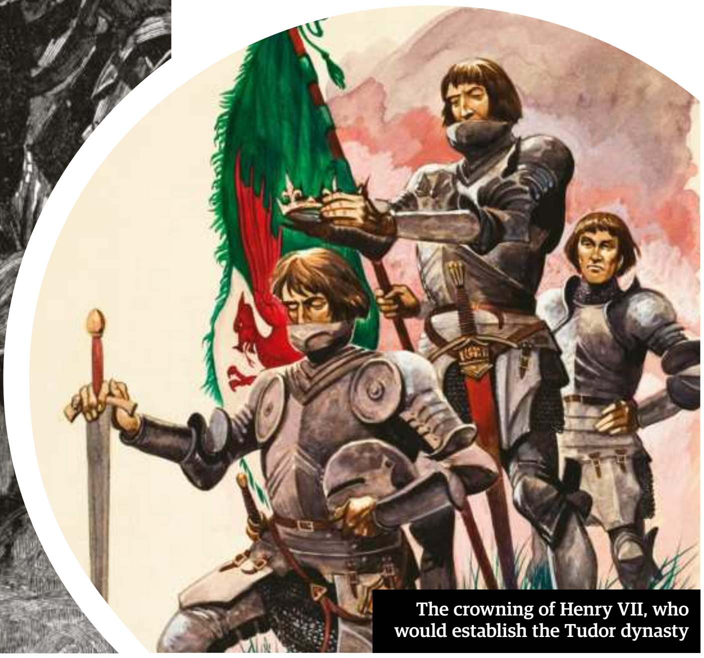
When the screams and the drums of war had died away, but the blood still startlingly vivid against the white snow, England had a new king. The House of York had emerged triumphant and Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou had been forced to flee to Scotland. Edward was officially crowned the new king of England in June the same year and slowly, one by one, the remaining pockets of Lancastrian soldiers were hunted down, either killed or forced to leave England. Margaret orchestrated an attack on Carlisle later that year but due to lack of financial power and men at arms, her advance was repulsed by Edward's Yorkist forces. Her loyal Duke of Somerset was later defeated and executed at the Battle of Hexham and her husband, Henry VI was captured and imprisoned by his foes yet again. This time he was held at the notorious Tower of London.

Bankrupt and no longer in command of any military support, Margaret had only one option left open to her – to return to France with her son. Setting sail from Scotland in mid-1465, Margaret of Anjou, once queen of England and leader of the House of Lancaster, was down for the count. Her position in England lay in ruin and her dream to see her son Edward of Lancaster crowned king was crushed. Importantly though, while Margaret and the House of Lancaster were down for the count, they were not down and out.

The following years of exile did nothing to dampen Margaret's ambitions as she would continue her plotting and scheming to take back the English throne like never before. In an audacious political move, she struck a deal with her former enemy, 'the Kingmaker' Earl of Warwick in an attempt to re-establish her previous control of England. While her husband Henry VI would lose his life in the Tower of London and Yorkist Edward IV would go on to be king along with his younger brother Richard III, by the time the fighting ceased in the climactic Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485 and the curtain on the Wars of the Roses was brought down, it was the Henry Tudor who would win the game of thrones and rise to become king of England.

The story of Henry Tudor's rise to the kingship of England, 20 years after Margaret's exile, and his subsequent founding of the historic Tudor dynasty is a story for another day. Tudor's meteoric elevation dominated the last years of the Wars of the Roses and his ultimate victory was far from a certainty at the time, with history painting a tale more at home with the concepts of luck and chance rather than those of divine right and might. For that was, in the end, the real truism of England's Wars of the Roses – that all is fair in love and war and that blood is everything.


Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth, the final battle of the Wars of the Roses


The crowning of Henry VII, who would establish the Tudor dynasty

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

ENGLAND'S GAME OF THRONES

Follow our comprehensive timeline of the key events that decided the outcome in the Wars of the Roses

Henry VI is born

The son of warrior king Henry V and Catherine de Valois, Henry VI was crowned king of both England and France during infancy. He would proceed to oversee England's final losses in the Hundred Years' War and famously married the strong and powerful Margaret of Anjou.

6 December 1421

The Kingmaker

Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick was one of the most powerful figures in the entire war, personally overseeing the deposition of two kings is born. He was killed at the Battle of Barnet.

22 November 1428

Margaret of Anjou is born

One of the key players in the Wars of the Roses, Margaret of Anjou, the future wife of King Henry VI, is born to René d'Anjou, Duke of Anjou and Isabel de Lorraine.

23 March 1430

Jasper Tudor is born

Son of legendary Welsh warrior Owen Tudor, who fought alongside Henry V at Agincourt, he would become a commander and play an important role in establishing Henry Tudor as king.

1431

The Battle of Edgecote Moor

After raising an army to put down an uprising in Yorkshire, King Edward IV's forces are intercepted by a Lancastrian one and defeated by Robin of Redesdale.

26 July 1469

Elizabeth of York is born

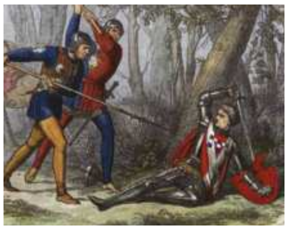
Elizabeth Woodville and Edward IV's only daughter to be born, Elizabeth of York would proceed to be queen consort of England under Henry VII. She is the Yorkist partner in the eventual joining of houses at the end of the Wars of the Roses.

11 February 1466

Battle of Losecote Field

Edward IV raises a new army and attacks Lancastrian troops at Empingham, winning well.

12 March 1470



The Kingmaker exits

The final curtain for 'the Kingmaker', Barnet sees Warwick die at the hand of Yorkist forces of Edward IV.

14 April 1471

Battle of Tewkesbury

Notable for the death of Margaret of Anjou's only son Edward and her own capture.

4 May 1471

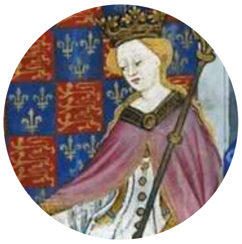
Henry VI dies

After a period of incarceration in the Tower of London, it is reported that Henry VI has died. Edward VI is suspected to have ordered his death mere hours before he himself was re-crowned as king.

21 May 1471

Margaret of Anjou is finally defeated 1475

After spending most of her life caring for her son Edward in an attempt to ensure his succession to the throne of England, his death at the Battle of Tewkesbury is the final blow to the once-powerful queen. With her spirit broken she is exiled back to France, where she spends the remainder of her life living as a poor relation of the French king.



Henry VI is restored to the throne

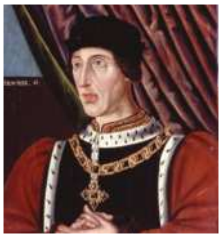
After been alienated and shunned by his old ally Edward IV, the Earl of Warwick strikes a deal with Margaret of Anjou to defeat the Yorkist king. 'The Kingmaker' restores Henry VI to the throne.

30 October 1470

The end of Somerset

The final battle of the experienced Lancastrian commander, the Duke of Somerset, Hexham saw a large Yorkist victory and Somerset's capture and execution.

15 May 1464



Edward IV dies at 40

After over a decade of successful rule as the king of England in two spells, Edward IV dies suddenly and unexpectedly, throwing the country back into political turmoil. His heir, Edward V, is only 12 years old at the time of his father's death.

9 April 1483

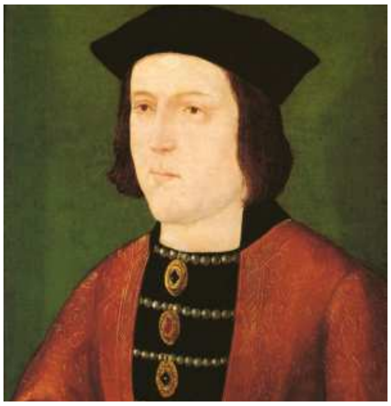
The Princes in the Tower die 1483

The only two sons alive at the time of their father's death Edward IV, Edward V of England and Richard of Shrewsbury are famously incarcerated in the Tower of London during their youth and then mysteriously disappear, likely killed to remove any possibility of them taking the throne at a future point. Who ordered the deaths is not known.

Future Yorkist king of England

Edward is the first son of Richard Plantagenet and Cicely Neville. Following his father's death at the Battle of Wakefield, Edward would famously join forces with his father's old ally, the Earl of Warwick ('the Kingmaker') and take the crown for himself in bloody warfare. He marries the politically savvy Elizabeth Woodville.

28 April 1442



Margaret Beaufort is born

The future mother of King Henry VII is born at Bletsoe Castle, Bedfordshire, England. She would become the influential matriarch that sees the rise and establishment of the Tudor Dynasty.

31 May 1443

Richard marches on London

Disaffected with a list of grievances, Richard of York marches to London from Ireland, demanding Edmund Beaufort, the Duke of Somerset, to be removed from office due to perceived failures. He is not supported at court, however, and returns a year later empty-handed.

1452

York is Lord Protector

After Henry VI's first mental breakdown, Richard of York returns to London and is named Lord Protector. York imprisons the Duke of Somerset in the Tower of London and forges his legendary warring relationship with Margaret of Anjou.

27 March 1453

The French defeat the English at Castillon

Following the disastrous Battle of Castillon, where French forces bring down the Hundred Years' War with a decisive victory over the English, Henry VI is told of the news and has his first mental breakdown.

17 July 1453

Margaret takes back power

Following Henry VI's miraculous Christmas Day recovery from his madness, his wife Margaret of Anjou wastes no time in reinstating the king as the court's top power and pushes Richard out of the capital.

February 1455

First Battle of St Albans

The opening battle of the Wars of the Roses. St Albans is a small and scrappy battle but still leads to the death of three Lancastrian nobles.

22 May 1455

Warwick becomes captain of Calais

Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, becomes the captain of Calais, a powerful financial and military position that leads him into his apex of power, heavily controlling the affairs not just of England but of parts of France too.

1455

Hostilities resume

After years of strained peace, hostilities break out again, with Richard Neville scoring a victory against a numerically superior foe.

23 September 1459

The Battle of Ludford Bridge

Following a victory at Blore Heath Yorkist supporters regroup at Ludford. However, a large army led by Henry VI arrives and many of the Yorkists flee.

12 October 1459

House of York gain the upper hand

An interesting battle due to the Lancastrian Lord Edmund Grey switching side to the Yorkists mid-battle. The Yorkists won easily and gained the upper hand in the Wars.

10 July 1460

Act of Accord signed

As a compromise, it is agreed that Richard of York is the rightful successor to the throne after Henry VI. This deal excludes Henry's son, Edward of Lancaster, from the throne, angering Margaret of Anjou.

October 1460

Battle of Wakefield

The last battle for Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York. Riding out from a defensive position at Sandal Castle, Richard is killed by Lancastrian forces.

30 December 1460

Lancastrian army routed

Following his father's defeat at Wakefield, Richard's son Edward routs a Lancastrian army under the leadership of Jasper Tudor.

2 February 1461

Second Battle of St. Albans

The follow-up battle to the one that kickstarted the Wars of the Roses, this time there are more men, more deaths and, importantly, a Lancastrian victory.

17 February 1461

Battle of Ferrybridge

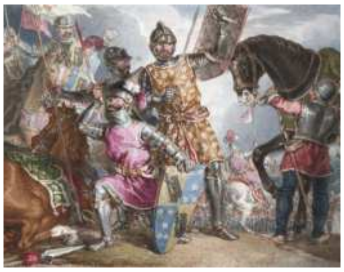
A small, precursory skirmish before the decisive and bloody Battle of Towton, Ferrybridge sees the Yorkist leader Lord Fitzwalter killed in action.

28 March 1461

The bloodiest battle

The most brutal battle of the Wars of the Roses, this clash sees almost 30,000 men die in driving snow near the village of Towton, Yorkshire.

29 March 1461



Edward's popular coronation

After clearing a path to the throne with a hard-fought victory at the Battle of Towton, Edward of York is crowned king in an official coronation in London. The coronation is well received by the public.

28 June 1461

Battle of Hedgeley Moor

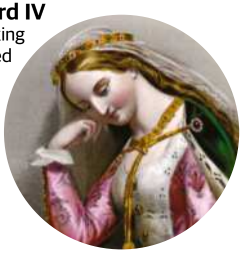
The brother of 'the Kingmaker' Warwick, John Neville, clashes with a Lancastrian force on his way to the border of Scotland to arrange a peace treaty.

25 April 1464

Elizabeth Woodville marries King Edward IV

Coming from a low-ranking family, Woodville is called 'the most beautiful woman in the Island of Britain' and she uses this trait to marry advantageously, walking down the isle with King Edward IV.

1 May 1464



Richard becomes king

Despite simply being named as Lord Protector by Edward IV, Richard III is crowned king after the infamous affair of the princes in the Tower.

6 July 1483

Buckingham revolts

Richard's ascension is immensely contentious and uprisings take place. One of the largest is a rebellion orchestrated by Henry Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, who is especially disaffected. His rebellion fails, however.

18 October 1483

Anne Neville dies

The wife of embattled king Richard III dies of what is now believed to be tuberculosis, at Westminster, London. There is an eclipse on the same day, which people see as an omen depicting the impending fall of Richard.

16 March 1485

Battle of Bosworth 22 August 1485

The decisive and climactic battle of the War of the Roses. The Battle of Bosworth sees the Yorkist king Richard III killed in combat, his 10,000-strong force routed and his enemy, the young and charismatic Henry Tudor, carve a direct path to the throne of England. He would be crowned King Henry VII months later.

The king's mother arrives at courts

Following her son Henry's victory at the Battle of Bosworth Field, Henry's mother Margaret Beaufort arrives at court and creates a new title for herself; 'My Lady the King's Mother', ensuring herself legal and social independence..

1485

Henry unites the Houses

18 January 1486

In his marriage to Elizabeth of York, the only daughter of Elizabeth Woodville, Henry VII finally unites the remnants of the two warring Houses of York and Lancaster. The product of this marriage marks the beginning of the House of Tudor and the Tudor Dynasty, which would go on to rule England until 24 March 1603.

The War of the Roses end 16 June 1487

Finally, after more than 30 years of turmoil, chaos, warfare, infighting, backstabbing, side-changing, murdering, scheming and plotting, the War of the Roses end with Henry Tudor quashing the last remaining threat to his throne at the Battle of Stoke. Henry proceeds to rule successfully for over 20 years, despite a couple of minor threats to his throne.

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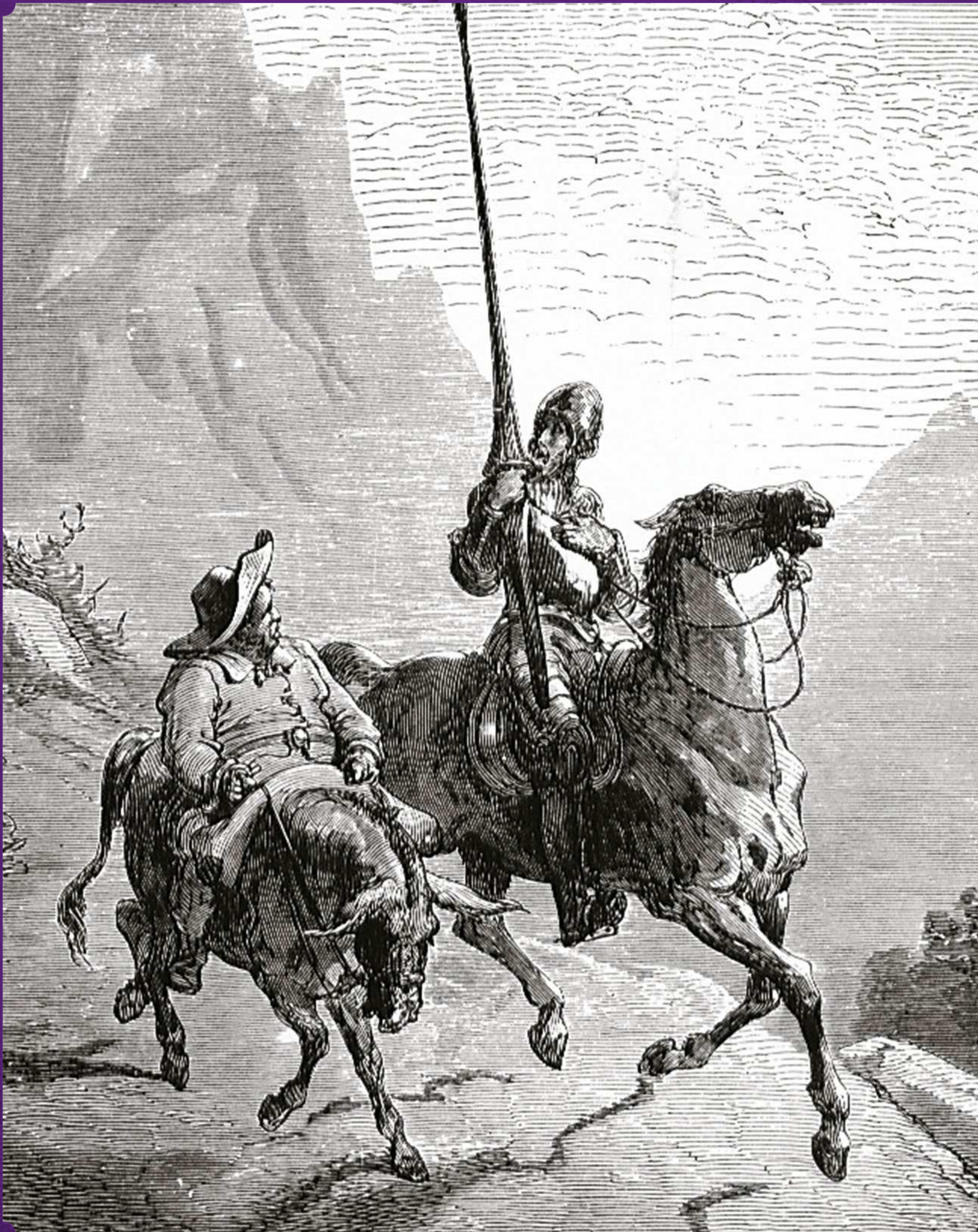


Downfall and legacy of the knights

The masters of the Medieval battlefield, knights had their spurs stripped by advancing technology

For centuries, European politics and warfare were dominated by the knightly classes. On the battlefield they formed the armoured core of an army, ready to smash the enemy with their superior training, weapons and armour. On the political battlefield they made up the majority of the nobility where kings, lords, dukes and barons vied for power. But changing military technology and tactics saw their battlefield role diminished. Centralisation of power and the growth of nationalism saw their political powers also change, as the title no longer held the power it did in the Middle Ages. These changes were gradual and occurred over hundreds of years, but did not see the knight disappear. Knighthoods and knightly orders still exist in today's society, although their role is now almost purely ceremonial, with some orders focusing on charity work – a far cry from their violent past.

From the 15th century onwards, the knight, who had enjoyed being top of the military hierarchy, saw its battlefield effectiveness begin to decline. Due to their high station, lengthy training and expensive equipment, knights would only make up a small percentage of a Medieval force's mounted contingent. For instance, by the time Henry V was campaigning in France and won his famous victory at Agincourt, less than five per cent of the English cavalry were composed of knights. The bulk of his mounted force, along with other contemporary armies, were sergeants, men-at-arms and squires. These soldiers filled largely the same tactical position that knights had in previous centuries, but lacked the title and prestige.

No single factor can be considered to explain this shift, but it was likely a combination of changing roles of knights (and higher-ranking individuals) in society, as well as a possible decrease in the number of people taking up knighthood. In late Medieval England, military service had shifted away from one of feudal obligation, to a system based more on raising taxes, and then hiring soldiers.

The introduction and improvement of firearms played a major role in the decline of heavily armoured cavalry. Before gunpowder weapons were in common use, wounding or killing a knight clad heel to toe in armour was quite a feat. Polearms, picks, hammers and maces were all employed against cavalry. When firearms became more commonplace on the battlefield, bringing with them excellent armour penetration, knights and armourers needed a solution. The initial reaction was to make the armour thicker so that the projectiles would simply bounce off. A simple answer in theory, but while highly skilled blacksmiths could make lighter, projectile-resistant breastplates, the majority of armour became too heavy to be worn effectively or efficiently. By the 1600s, cavalry armour had been reduced to bracers and a breastplate, considered the bare minimum to

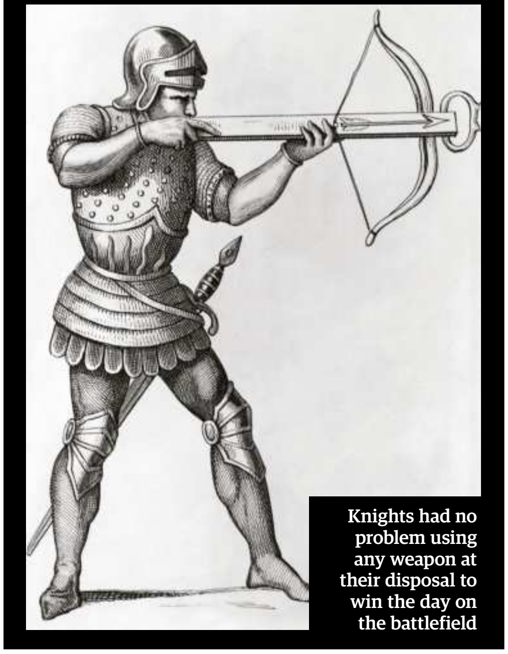
Up close and personal

Knights were not the only formidable opponent on the battlefield

The decline of the knight on the battlefield is sometimes paralleled with the effectiveness of projectile weapons like the longbow, crossbow and firearm. During the Hundred Years' War at battles like Agincourt and Cressy, the English bowmen took a fearsome toll on the feared French knights. While these victories highlighted some of the shortcomings of heavily armoured and slow-manoeuvring units, they did little to actively decrease the use of knights on the battlefield.

In France, the position of master of the crossbows was a coveted royal appointment, and was chosen by the king himself. The master of the crossbows would have been an aristocrat who would fight as a mounted knight in combat, rather than as a crossbowman, as his station might suggest. Similarly, English kings would have bowmen as part of their retinue and bodyguard, along with household knights. The difference in equipment, training and wages that these fighting received was what set them apart; not the battlefield philosophy that they followed.

The idea that knights, or the chivalric code that is often mentioned as justification, held disdain for ranged weapons over any other does not hold weight. The role of the knight declined for several reasons, although hatred for bows was not one.



Knights had no problem using any weapon at their disposal to win the day on the battlefield

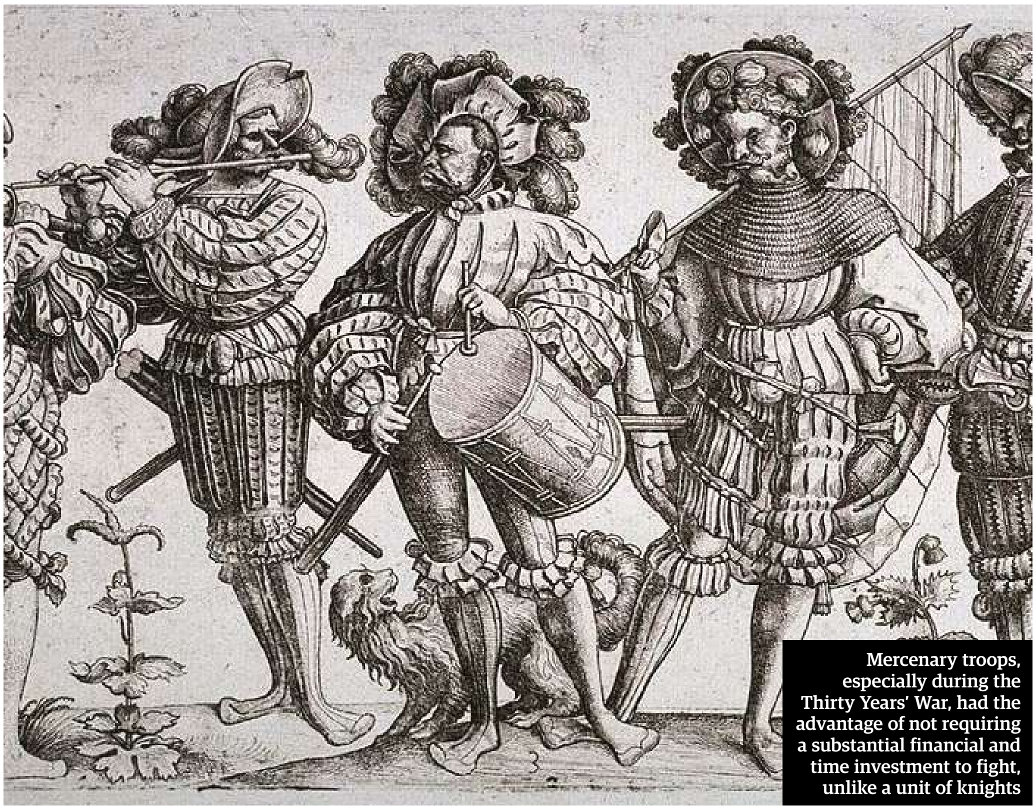
provide protection and still allow the rider some flexibility.

The iconic mounted weapon of the knight, the lance, was also becoming obsolete. A shock weapon, the lance was used on the charge to break enemy formations, but it was cumbersome and tended to shatter on impact leaving it a one-hit wonder. Gunpowder weapons had reached a level of sophistication where they could be made as handheld pistols. Now the lance's main rival, the pistol had better armour penetration and greater range, and its small size enabled a rider to carry multiple loaded firearms over a single lance. They could also be used in quick succession, allowing a unit of cavalry to smash an enemy formation much more effectively. Once advancing to pistol range, the front rank would fire and 'peel' off to the back of the formation, leaving the second rank to do the same. This tactic, usually employing around 12 horsemen deep, was called 'caracoling', and effectively punched through or broke up enemy formations. With the reduction of armour and improvement of weapons, the cost of training and outfitting this new generation of cavalry also decreased. Lower wages meant larger unit sizes, and in the harsh terms of war, this cost-to-benefit ratio was seen as more than acceptable.

The speed in which firearms overtook the battlefield also hastened the knight's downfall. In the beginning of the 16th century, infantry were mostly armed with pikes, which gave them reach and a decent measure of protection against mounted men. Soldiers like Swiss mercenaries or Landsknechts would have less than half their formation armed with guns. A century later, firearms would come to outnumber pikes two to one, spelling disaster for mounted units. This evolution of cavalry saw the traditional mounted knight sidelined. While mounted units were used up until World War I, their battlefield role and equipment evolved.

The decline of the knight went in tandem with the rise of European nations' need for a standing, professional army. The near constant warfare of the 17th century, especially the near-catastrophic Thirty Years' War, showed rulers that they could not rely on feudal levies or mercenary troops to protect their kingdoms. A lord's household knights would be well trained and equipped, but would only make up a fraction of the army. Levies were usually untrained or not of the same standard as professional soldiers. Mercenaries were becoming a more favourable option as they came with their own training and weapons but were expensive and, if unpaid or left unchecked, could wreak havoc across the countryside, both friend and foe. In a world where political power stemmed from the size of your military force, a class of warrior that was expensive, numerically small and not totally beholden to any one ruler was simply

> The decline of the knight went in tandem with the rise of European nations' need for a standing, professional army



Mercenary troops, especially during the Thirty Years' War, had the advantage of not requiring a substantial financial and time investment to fight, unlike a unit of knights

The Order of the Garter, founded in the 14th century, is among the oldest and most prestigious knightly orders still in existence

not practical. Centralisation of governmental power meant that troops could be raised and supplied the year round with the nation footing the bill, rather than unreliable feudal levies that were beholden to their liege lord first and the nation or ruler second. A knight was a political figure as well as a military one, historically expected to provide troops for a ruler's army, as well as form the core of their elite fighting force. With the centralisation of power and rise of the standing army coinciding with the rise of nationalism, men fought for king and country as opposed to just the king, as in previous centuries

The Renaissance, and its revival of humanist ideas, was damaging to the character and perception of the knight. With humanism attacking Medieval social culture, the concept of chivalry came under fire. Knightly virtue was inexorably tied to this concept, and so the view of the virtuous knight fell by the wayside. In 17th-century novels like *Don Quixote*, the main character extols chivalric virtues as good and true, but they are shown to be antiquated by the rest of the cast. Much like the old battlefield role of the knight had been sidelined, so too had the moral code.

The character of the knight, romanticised almost beyond recognition, made a comeback during the Victorian period. Stifling social constraints made anything Medieval seem thrilling, dangerous and romantic. Social upheaval in the form of the industrial revolution saw societal norms become challenged. Things like prearranged gender roles were turned on their heads, with both sexes now working in factories. Manual labour was usually seen as a masculine line of work, and the rise of the knight as a paragon of virtue comes from this. The idea of a strong, martial and above all masculine character stepping up to defend a woman's virtue was the product of a societal anxiety from these perceived challenges to a man's role in the world. This spawned the image of a brave knight defending a damsel in distress.

Knights, individuals as well as knightly orders, are still present in society today, although their role has somewhat changed. The militaristic orders, like the Knights Hospitaller, have slowly evolved throughout the centuries, and have now abandoned their combat role in place of charitable work and secularisation. Other orders, like the English Order of the Garter, have similarly put their militaristic origins to bed. Now open to any citizen, in an effort to make the award more egalitarian, the award is now purely symbolic. Those receiving it have contributed something significant to their particular field, and on the upside are no longer required to give military service to the country. The title of knight is still involved with a country's royalty, and usually only the ruling monarch (like the queen in the United Kingdom) can conduct the ceremonies. These are often lavish displays that highlight the achievement of the participant.

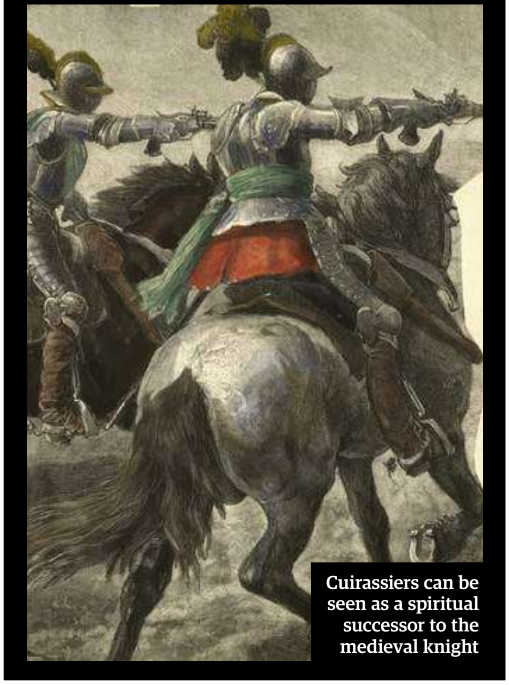
"Things like prearranged gender roles were turned on their heads, with both sexes now working in factories"

A mounted legacy

The legend of the knight would not die, but merely change with time

The battlefield role of the knight was not one that died with them, but rather it evolved. Units like currasiers, which came about in the 16th century and were so named from the metal breastplates or currasis that they adopted instead of full armour, stepped up to fill the knight's role. These heavy cavalry used tall men on large horses bred for war that would thunder across the battlefield and break apart enemy formations. Although used for a few centuries after the decline of the knight, the currasiers found their footing in the Napoleonic Wars.

With lighter cavalry taking the role of scouts and skirmishers, the heavy cavalry were free to be used like an iron fist, smashing apart the enemy line in a flurry of steel and horses. Gone were the lances of the medieval knight, and heavy, straight cavalry sabers replaced them. Much like a charging mass of medieval knights, the currasiers' charge carried with it great psychological impact. A wall of armour and beast crashing down upon an enemy was sometimes enough to break an enemy formation before contact was made. In this way, the military legacy of the knight was very much continued.



Cuirassiers can be seen as a spiritual successor to the medieval knight

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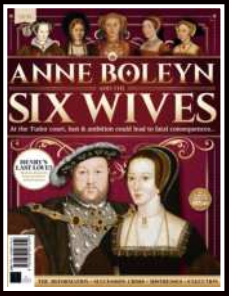
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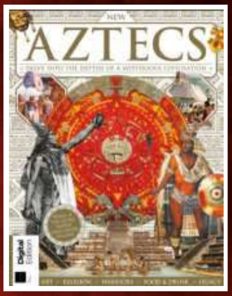

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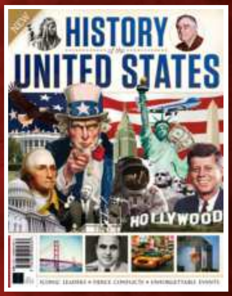
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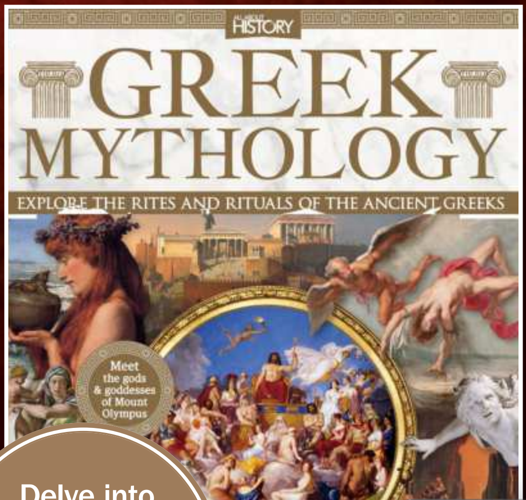
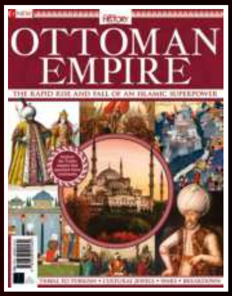

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